















# MORDAUNT HALL;

OR,

## A SEPTEMBER NIGHT.

### A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“TWO OLD MEN’S TALES,” “EMILIA WYNDHAM,”

“ANGELA,” &c.

“The self-remembering soul sweetly recovers  
Her kindred with the stars; nor basely hovers  
Below — but meditates th’ immortal way  
Home to the source of light, and intellectual day.”

CRASHAW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# MORDAUNT HALL.

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## CHAPTER I.

“And round about he taught flowres to grow,  
The rose engrained in pure scarlet die,  
The lily fresh and violet below,  
The marygold and cheerful rosemarie.”

SPENSER.

EMPIRES dissolve around us—the world that was crumbles to pieces, and disappears in ashes—old things are passed away, and the Prophet of History prepares to sing a new song,—

A song which wisdom and goodness may render in harmonious accord with that with which the morning stars saluted the creation, when all the sons of God shouted for joy; or which through folly, selfishness, injustice, and vanity may be lost in one groan of lamentation, such as that with which our great poet gives voice

VOL. I.

B

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to Nature, when, with a few sad drops, she moaned over a long course of error, darkness, and confusion about to begin.

I am writing this March the 25th, 1848. Before these pages see the light the die will, in all probability, be cast; the course, for good or evil, chosen; and the fate of the world for the next century decided.

Oh, my dear, dear country! with many mistakes and errors has thy course been obstructed, and much of folly and sin has found place within thy beloved circle of social life; but upon the whole thy course may be likened to that of a God-fearing, righteous man, based upon principles of religion, humanity, and justice. Deviations there have been—fallings back and fallings short, but the average of conduct has been in the right direction; the blessing of Him, who is not severe to mark what is done amiss, where intention has been pure and endeavour sincere, has blessed thy wise and righteous course; and while the world without is trembling to its centre, there is peace within.

Poor, unfortunate France! Severe is the discipline, fiery the trial, that appear prepared for you: the remedy for so much irrational expectation—so much unjust coveting of what belongs to others—so much irreligious rebellion against

the laws of society and nature ; so much open, and so much secret revolt, against the Lord and Master of us all—is sharp. By His blessing, may it become effectual; and may the grand principles upon which alone society can in peace exist, succeed to the wild and impossible dreams to which the ardent imagination of your too sensitive and excitable nation has for half a century been stimulated by those who, misled by the benevolence of their hearts or by the fiery ambition of their natures, have forgotten the terms upon which good alone can exist. In pity for the idle and degraded, they have forgotten the claims of the industrious and the honourable — abandoning themselves to those wild and impossible theories which it seems the fate of France, by a gigantic example, to disprove, as, by a gigantic effort, she has attempted to realise them.

I feel all this more strongly than I can find words to express, as here, under the shadow of that balanced constitution, so admirably suited to blend with the varied conditions of mankind—of those laws, which, while they protect the property of the rich, equally protect the industry of the poor—of that system, under which every individual household called upon to provide for its own wellbeing by its own rational exertion, and its own individual strength—labours with all the

liveliness and energy which the sense of *own-ness*, of responsibility to be shifted upon no other alone can give—feels assured of the recompense for well-directed effort, and assured of the punishment which *neglect*, *indolence*, or *vice*, will, sooner or later, entail——

Here I sit, while all seems rushing into chaos but a few leagues away, and secure in the enjoyment of what is my *own*—secure of my time, my free thoughts, my free action, my free dispensation of what I possess, and the recompense of my labours; give forth, in peace untroubled but by pity for the lot of a nation I must ever love, in spite of all its madness and its folly, those thoughts which flow unshackled to my pen.

Nature is breathing its “peace which passeth understanding” around me; the clouds and rain that have deluged us for so many weeks are clearing away; the stir of pleasant industry is in our fields—men, women, children, all are busy, putting in the seeds (an operation which the weather has delayed), in hope, by the blessing of God, of a fruitful, plentiful return; the buds are swelling upon the trees, and again renewing the tale of His abundant goodness, who breathes life and beauty with every returning year into this His lovely, lovely world. His beauty is reviving in the tinting woods, His voice of tenderness—



oh, the word is used in deepest reverence!—the voice of Him, before whom not even a sparrow falls unnoticed to the ground—that voice is heard in all the notes of the innumerable little feathered creatures which fill the air on every side, all rejoicing, happy beings, each in his own dear individual little home.

At moments such as these, who but yearns to join his accents to the general hymn; and, lifting up his voice, to say,—

“ These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,  
Almighty! Thine this universal frame . . .  
Thyself how wondrous then!”

Oh, may He, whose visible sun beams upon, and warms, and lightens to fresh and renewed life, this animated world of nature, send forth the rays of that better Sun, that light which purifies and brightens the inner soul of man, upon his darkened spirit! Oh, may He, our Lord and Master, who reigns and lives—present, though absent—still guiding (blessed, though unseen, Shepherd!) His flock—lead us through this wilderness of confusion and despair to those green fields and fountains of living water, which shall indeed nourish and renew us to the true and real life! Oh, may we become Christians! all of us, not in name and in word only, but in deed and

in truth. Then shall the sacrifice be pleasant, as of old; and thy God shall return to thee, O Jacob!

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I have related stories which have had reference to the mistakes, errors, and difficulties of those who, upon the whole, were well-meaning; to the evils entailed by such faults upon the innocent, and the obstruction by them laid in the paths of the pious and the good; I have dealt with the upper stratum, if I may use the expression, of human errors, without diving into the deeper and darker mysteries which lie beneath—*the mysteries of Sin*.

You have had patience with my many imperfections, and have sympathised most generously and kindly with me where I have succeeded in my representations, whilst I endeavoured to deal with what I thought some of the most hurtful defects of our common nature, and have selected those histories calculated, as I thought, to expose them; to-day a darker spirit comes over me: will you enter the cloud with me, and, without murmuring or revolting at the gloom which covers you, behold the results of Vice?

Shall we reflect together upon the misery to which it exposes its victims, and the long train of evil consequences which it entails upon the innocent who come into connexion with it? But let us do this in sadness, not in despair, convinced that there is a Power at work yet stronger than that of evil.

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There is a small town in that mountainous district which forms part of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and the West Riding of Yorkshire, which I, for convenience sake, will call Kettlewell. It consists of one long street, composed of stone houses, roofed with slate, running along a kind of ravine between mountains covered with heather. It is a wild, romantic little place; and though the mountains on each side are bare, precipitous, and frowning, not without beauty, as well as a certain sublimity.

It is very grand to see the black, threatening clouds on a stormy day, rolling round the rugged fronts of these frowning mountains; and to hear the thunder rattling and crackling amid the

echoing rocks. And it is a lovely walk, whichever way you take it, up the little valley; for a rushing and sparkling stream rolls down it; and small meadows, rich with the deposits of ages — with grass, green as emerald, and literally enamelled with flowers, are upon each side. Willows and alders hang over the banks of the brook; and copses of oak, mountain-ash, and hazel creep up the sides, and linger among the precipitous nooks of the mountains; sheep and small black cattle are to be seen in plenty upon every side; thrushes and blackbirds are heard singing, and cuckoos calling; — while the soft misty air gives that tender blue to a serene and cloudless sky, which I have heard no mean judges prefer to all the deep azure of Italy.

All small towns in England are, or used to be, constituted much upon the same pattern. There was a pretty considerable inn in the good old posting-time; and this town, though so out of the way in most respects, lay upon one of the great posting-roads. There was an apothecary, surgeon, or general practitioner, all in one; whose little shop, small as it appeared, was one of the most considerable of the place; and whose profession, in spite of the sound of pestle and mortar to be heard from within, constituted the owner a gentleman. There was the attorney, who, being at the same

time agent to several estates in the neighbourhood, was a man of considerable substance; he possessed a sash-windowed and rather handsome-fronted house, with garden of extent behind, and brass knocker at the door. There was the little church, with its lowly tower, nestling among some very ancient fir-trees; and the tiny parsonage, about twenty yards from the churchyard wall. There was the little modest Independent chapel, at one end of the town; and there were a few shops of respectable appearance, belonging to the linendraper, the ironmonger, and the saddler of the place.

One or two houses, moreover, that vied with the mansion of the attorney, were inhabited by various inferior branches of the country families around—chiefly of the female sex, be it said, who employed their evenings in card-parties and tea-drinkings, and their mornings in working for and visiting the poor; for the little old clergyman was very weak in health and his salary excessively small, and without these good Tabithas, who thus went singly about endeavouring to make themselves useful, and to please God in their humble way, things would have gone on among the poor but ill. As they managed it, however, things upon the whole went on very comfortably at Kettlewell.

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The little society lived very much to itself, and certainly events were few, and excitement a rare pleasure: but excitement was little wanted, and everybody seemed contented, except, it may be, a few pretty girls and a few anxious mothers, who wondered where husbands were to be got, unless they came down from the clouds.

Now we will walk to the end of the principal street, called the Hospital Street, from a very ancient hospital for decayed tradesmen at one end of it, and thence into the country. We shall soon come into the open heathy regions beyond; and about a mile out of the town, nestling among some trees in a sort of nook among the hills, we shall see a lowly white cottage lying there, like a lodge in the wilderness. It is surrounded by a garden of considerable dimensions, which industry has rescued from the waste, and which is enclosed by a low mound surmounted by a hedge of quickset, maple, and wild roses.

Nothing could be more humble than the little abode, but it was fanciful and pretty. Upon the thatch grew the stonecrop and the houseleek, and the honeysuckle and sweetbrier hung about the tiny windows. The smoke rose from the little dowdy chimney, cheerfully winding its white columns through the clear air, and told of warmth and comfort within; whilst the door,

ever open to the calls of affection or the asking voice of charity, was a type of the hearts of the inhabitants.

The garden was cut into numerous fanciful shapes, borders, and patterns, and laid out in a quaint manner. The walks were composed of many-coloured pebbles, collected among the hills; the beds were surrounded with box, or thrift, or double daisies: but the useful and the beautiful had been combined by the persevering artist to whom its existence was owing. Strawberries and currants blushed in the neighbourhood of pinks and gillyflowers; gooseberries and moss-roses grew together in excellent amity; apple and pear-trees, plum and cherry, judas and double-flowering peach, guelder-rose and lilac, laburnum and bladder-senna, blended in most admired confusion.

Wherever there was room for slip, or sucker, or graft, were it of flowering shrub or new and excellent tree, the place was speedily occupied; for the gardener who cultivated this little paradise with his own hands, ever ready to impart to others, was not shy of begging himself: he, unlike too many brothers of his craft, never could be made to understand how the value of a specimen should depend upon its scarceness. Beauty and excellence were all he valued in

fruit or flower ; and his heart was too unboundedly generous not to take delight in their diffusion.

He was, indeed, a most loveable old man—simple in his wisdom, childish in his confidence, shrewd in his observations, cheerful in his temper, gentle, generous, and loving in his heart. He had once, I have been told, been a Christian pastor to a small, very small and very exclusive, congregation ; but his congregation had forsaken him, and he had never endeavoured to establish himself in any other. To tell the truth, he had lived through a time when scepticism reigned throughout society—when every thing was called into question,—the existence of virtue, the nature of right and duty, the high promises of the Gospel, the very being of God ; and men are, after all, in great measure the creatures of their day. What the peculiar opinions of this man actually were, I never have been able quite to discover. That he worshipped the Author of his being—the Father of the creation in which he so cheerfully rejoiced—is certain, and with the pure incense of a heart which was purity itself. Free from all bitterness and malice, covetousness and uncharitableness of every description—nay, made up of love he was—so that his whole character was in harmony with the teaching of the



blessed Jesus of Nazareth ; but how far the prevailing opinions of his time had obscured the true light, which by that Lord and Master was dispensed to mankind—how far doubtings, and questionings, and endeavours to reason upon the nature of transcendental truths, had perplexed and distorted his faith, I will not pretend to decide.

That he had thought much and deeply upon these things while engaged at his peaceful occupation amid his fruit and flowers, cannot be doubted ; but to what degree of assurance he had attained will never be known. As was the practice with many at that time, he maintained the greatest reserve upon the subject of his religious opinions ; and though, whenever he alluded to the Christian religion—a thing, indeed, which he rarely did—it was in terms of deep and lowly reverence : this was rather the reverence paid to some sublime and dark mystery than the cheerful, hearty love, of a faithful believer.

I hope none of my readers, in their earnest and devout conviction of the immense value of Christianity, will mistake my meaning in this delineation ; or, because I here represent so sweet and lovely a temper as belonging to one in this peculiar state of mind, think that *I* underrate that blessed light—that true guide—which will

alone, in my opinion, be ever found effectual to rescue men from their follies and their crimes. But, as I hold narrowness and exclusiveness of spirit to be one of the greatest blemishes which can obscure the faithful Christian's character, I am not sorry that the course of my story obliges me to the delineation of a character—for such unquestionably may be found—to whom God had dispensed these sweet influences of the heart, though it had pleased Him to withhold the full perception of that true light which His mercy has sent into the world.

The garden is entered by a little narrow wicket, and as soon as you are within the enclosure you are almost as if in a scene from a fairy tale. In spring time, such double-violets scenting the air!—such primroses, daffodils, narcissuses, hyacinths, and auriculas!—and all the fruit-trees in full blossom too! Such a wilderness of beauty and sweetness!

In summer there were roses, red, yellow, purple, white!—such larkspurs, convolvuluses, sweet-williams, and carnations!—such beds of mignonette!—such currants, red and white!—such gooseberries, raspberries, cherries, and strawberries!

In autumn, such a rich profusion of apples, pears, and plums, red, yellow, and purple, hang-

ing amid the leaves! Such beds of china-asters! such marigolds, and chrysanthemums!

There you may see the author of this living poem—a small, thin man, with delicate attenuated features, a complexion pale, and step slow and somewhat dawdling, walking or rather creeping about, with his pruning-knife or his trowel in his hand, employed at his usual recreation—recreation I must call it—for gardening was not his sole employment; this man was a man of deep science, of great powers of abstraction, and immense of calculation—he was one of the first scientific men of his day. His time was divided between the most abstruse speculations and painful exertions of intellect, and the delight of cultivating his garden. To these two objects his peaceful life was entirely devoted, with two exceptions. One being the attention to his sick or sorrowing neighbours, upon whom he bestowed his advice when asked, or with whom he shared his little purse when needed: the other was his one, only, daughter.

He had married, somewhat late in life, a young woman, who had brought him a little money, upon which he now subsisted; she had died early, and left him with one little girl.

Never was a sweeter treasure bestowed upon a father, and never did father more devotedly, more

ardently, cherish the gift. She had been a beautiful child ; she was at this time a very beautiful young woman—if young woman she might be called, being not quite twenty. She was the idol of her father's heart, and the delight of his eyes.

A rare and precious creature, certainly, as formed by nature ; and the wild unchecked developement of that nature rendered her singularly attractive to the imagination. No governess, no school, no systematic education had interfered with the free and lovely growth of her singularly fine faculties ; but, alas ! no mother's hand had been there to contribute the precious guidance of the female heart and female mind ; to soften, to subdue, to direct, to instil into that infant bosom those lessons, the impressions from which, like the original lineaments of the characters, are found in after life indelible influences, without which a certain consistency, stability—solidity rather, will be found almost invariably to be wanting.

Her father, singular as he was, had been in many respects better fitted to perform the difficult task of rearing a daughter without a mother's assistance than men usually are. He was of a very tender and feeling temper ; of a calm and gentle disposition ; had much love of home, a most affectionate heart, and whilst a pene-

trating observer of character, and weigher of things, possessed the greatest simplicity and purity of life and manners. The father and daughter had been inseparable companions—that is, they had scarcely, during their mutual lives, been parted for a day; and yet of those days, how many hours were passed in solitary thought and occupation; how many hours of every week, which this philosopher and man of science passed in abstracted thought, was Miriam left to employ herself as she would, doing exactly what she pleased, without being called to account by any living creature!

Her father had very peculiar opinions with respect to many things besides the grand and important subject of religion. He had singular ideas as regarded female education—one of the subjects upon which the world was at that time undergoing as great a revolution as upon politics and religion. Days of revolution might be almost defined Days of experiment. Every thing has to be tried and put to proof over again; maxims long established are brought to the test, as well as new and unpractised theories; every individual mind is left to its own choice and guidance; the exaggerations and eccentricities are many, and the really sound and good directions few.

Women had lived contented, useful, and happy, ere Mary Wolstoncroft proclaimed their *rights*, but, with all her nonsense and exaggeration, even Mary Wolstoncroft had her mission, and did good. Women have been still more contented, for they have been still more useful, and much more happy, since their eyes were opened to the value of their own powers; since they cultivated and improved their intellects, strengthened and corrected their characters, and enlarged their sphere of action and enjoyment.

The corrections of experience have abated in great measure the wild exaggerations and mistaken views of the early champion of womanhood—the attempt to rival man is, in great measure, abandoned; and to perfect themselves as *women*, has become the wise ambition of the sex. The best of them are perfectly contented to dwell in, and administer in that department of this world's business for which their Creator has so eminently endowed them, and to fulfil the lovely—one might almost say heavenly part allotted them to perform: but in those early days the discriminating lines in this, as in other things, had not been drawn. Suddenly emancipated from the restraints which for so many ages past fettered, perhaps we ought to say *guided*, society,

men rushed into all the extravagancies of Utopian and impossible schemes as regarded politics, and into the most unbounded license as regarded religion; and woman—no longer to be considered as the mere household subordinate of man, and released from the narrow, fantastical social laws which had rendered her dependent and feeble—could find at first no better use to make of her liberty than to endeavour to emancipate herself from the wholesome restraints of her sex, which it was the fashion of that day to call *prejudices*.

Many men at the time gave into the delusion; and our recluse, whose mind had gone too far upon almost every subject then in discussion, was not likely to shew more moderation upon that of woman's education.

One of the maxims then in vogue was to leave every thing to Nature. Nature, it was argued, must develope herself in a far more perfect manner than any art could attain. They pointed to the statues of the Grecian nymphs in contrast with the whalebone-constricted beauties of the days of Louis Quinze, and they asked triumphantly, which was the most beautiful?

So they threw away the whalebone, and strove to adopt the Grecian garb. But they forgot two things—that girls died of consumption in a climate like this when arrayed in such grace-

ful draperies, and that unassisted Nature produces squaws and bushwomen as well as the exquisite forms of Grecian beauty (if, indeed, such beauty *was* the production of mere unassisted Nature, which remains to be proved). Because dress and the exterior graces, clean houses and good tables, had been almost the exclusive study of the female mind in England during the middle of the last century, they ran into the other extreme; and a great many pretty slatterns, disagreeable hoydens, careless housekeepers, and ill-kept houses, were the result: the spirit of thrift and good housewifery expired for the time,—and, I fear, it has as yet but faintly revived among the lower classes, to whom the fashions and ways of thinking current among their betters inevitably descend. But our young ladies of the present day seem to me very much corrected of this error, and are taking the medium line most charmingly, I think.

I could almost believe I could not be so “old” as I profess to be, for I want one of the marks of old age—the preference of past days to the present. Much as I grumble at some changes which I see around me, I think the progress made since I was a child quite astonishing; and in nothing more encouraging than in the present rising crop of young people, men and women;



there seems to me among them almost every thing that is promising and delightful.

Miriam—for it is time to return to her—had been, in fact, brought up more like a little boy than a girl. She had been taught to delight in manly sports and exercises, to aspire to manly virtues, and to claim manly freedom from restraint. A beautiful little tom-boy of a child she undoubtedly had been ; and as she accompanied her father in his rambles, scrambling over hedge and ditch, tearing frocks, and with her bonnet every conceivable form but the right one—as her beautiful little face was tanned brown as that of a gipsy, and her arms, which might have served for an artist to model, took the colour of a ruddy apple, her father compared her in pride and exultation of heart with the little timid girls he saw around him, and rejoiced in the health and vigour thus acquired.

It was a pity that he could not keep all this pride and exultation to himself, but that the little one was early taught to look upon female delicacy, and good, orderly, well-behaved, timid little girls, with something of the contempt that he did.

As regarded lessons, more properly so called, he taught her himself. He had the most unmitigated contempt for governesses and schools, and most of the laughable aversion to drawing

and dancing-masters, fine manners, and the graces, which may be detected in many of the popular children's stories of his day. This, as far as the outer semblance was concerned, proved of little ill consequence. Miriam grew up only too graceful, and with a form like a Grecian nymph indeed, so perfect were its outline and symmetry. Her mind, too, as far as acquirements went, was not one whit the worse for only receiving the instructions of her father; but alas, alas, how much besides was still left wanting!

He taught her Latin and Greek, algebra and geometry. She read with him history and metaphysics; she read romances and poetry by herself. But the Bible lay covered with dust upon the shelf, and the Prayer-book was seldom opened—he had all, and more than all, the sophisticated notions of his day connected with both; and though, as I believe is universal with every parent in the world, he would not—could not have endured the idea of directly imparting his own sceptical opinions to his daughter, he left the matter to chance. Her nurse had taught her to say her prayers, and, when she was a little one, had taken her on a Sunday to church, because she could not conveniently leave her behind; but, as Miriam grew up, this important habit of joining her fellow-creatures in worship

almost altogether died away. Her father and she used to speak of the *Deity* with reverence and awe when of that great Being they spoke at all,—for he seemed to fancy this distant awe and reverence the only offering meet for the mysterious Immensity—but, under the influence of such motives, all the childlike relations—all the communion of love and hope—of prayer, and trust, and obedience, to the Father of men, which open upon the soul of the Christian, were lost to *him* altogether, and they were but as faint, dreamy impulses with her.

The inhabitants of the town were either Church people or Wesleyan Methodists. They were ordinary people too, for the most part—and ordinary minds, when really in earnest in their religious profession, are very apt to think they prove this earnestness best by their censure and contempt for those who do not think and feel upon the subject with the warmth that they do. They, in short, are too often prone to look upon their religious feelings as matters of personal merit, of which they have a right to be proud, rather than as high and undeserved blessings and privileges for which they are to render an account; and instead of the sympathising pity with which those so favoured with light ought to look upon their darkened fellow-creatures, they endeavour, and

too often succeed, in rendering that darkness more utterly dark by the severance they endeavour to maintain, and the condemnations they utter.

Nobody could personally dislike either Miriam or her father, he was so gentle and benevolent, and she so frank and endearing ; but they rarely, almost never, appeared at church or chapel, and this was unaccountable and wrong,—nay, threw a sort of unholy mystery about them, which alienated the hearts of their neighbours more than it is very easy to calculate. Unfortunately, when the recluse discovered this to be the case, his attendance at public worship ceased altogether. He had maintained the custom of going there, from time to time, out of a sort of philosophical respect for the arrangements of society, but when his opinions became matters of personal blame, he felt it to be an hypocrisy to endeavour to disguise them—to frequent church in order to avoid censure, and secure the good opinion of his neighbours, seemed to him, as it were, to practise a delusion upon them ; from this his soul revolted, and he went no more.

Gradually almost all communication with the little society of the town ceased. When Miriam now and then went in to visit the shops and make a few purchases, common civilities were exchanged between her and any of the young

girls of her own age whom she chanced to meet ; but she was never invited to their houses, never asked to make one in their little pic-nic summer parties. It was impossible to lead a more secluded life than for the last two or three years she had done.

Neither father nor daughter appeared to care for these things much ; their love for each other was perfectly devoted. They had too many intellectual resources, and too much active occupation in their garden and those walking excursions in which they visited all the nooks and corners of the country, to need excitement of any kind. The gentlemen of the town,—the surgeon, the solicitor, and so on,—used to drop in from time to time to visit the garden, this afforded some slight change of ideas now and then.

When any of these gentlemen would return home from their visits, they would usually excite a little mite of envy and vexation in the bosoms of their good wives and good little daughters by declaring that Miriam was growing up the most perfect beauty that ever was seen.

## CHAPTER II.

“Duty, like a strict preceptor,  
Sometimes frowns, or seems to frown;  
Choose her thistle for thy sceptre  
While thy brow youth’s roses crown.  
Grasp it.” WORDSWORTH.

I SAID they took long rambles.

Not only did they visit every secluded valley and hidden nook of those surrounding mountains, not only was every rippling rill and gleaming peak well known to them, not only did they revel in the glad sunshine, and exult in battling with the terrors of the mountain-storms, but at times they would set out together and undertake pedestrian expeditions of several days.

Hand in hand, the thin, delicate-looking father and the fine stout little girl might be seen wandering along. They would rest for the night at any humble house of entertainment they might chance to find, sitting down and chatting with

the chance visitants of the little inn; and thus Miriam grew acquainted with human nature in its simpler forms. Her heart expanded under these influences to a most prevailing love of every body; but her ideas acquired no delicacy, and her principles no correctness.

The cottage in which the two lived was quite a little treasure in itself. They had both taken the greatest delight in adorning it. It was a real cottage, no pretence to one; but larger in extent than cottages usually are, and with four rooms on each floor, but all huddled together, however; the windows of the upper story being almost buried in the thick roof of thatch and moss combined, which told of the accumulations literally of ages, and the lower rooms being very low and darkened by the trees that hung around, and by the plants that climbed all about them.

A kitchen, a parlour, her father's study, and Miriam's own little room, occupied the ground-floor.

The study was lined with books, and the table covered with mathematical and scientific instruments. An electric machine, with its necessary appendages of jars, &c., stood in the centre, with quadrants, globes, and a magnificent reflecting telescope. Floor, couch, shelves, chairs, window-seat, were filled with books, which lay littering

about upon every side. There remained only one old arm-chair unoccupied, where the philosopher could sit down, and one little low stool near it, upon which his daughter placed herself when she came to visit his domicile.

But Miriam's own room, in spite of her being the sad sloven I have hinted at, was really quite pretty. She had adorned it with the various specimens of mosses, pebbles, shells, and other natural curiosities, which she had collected in her many ramblings. She had also an art of arranging the beautiful colours of feathers so as to make sundry gay and pretty ornaments. There was a practice then of representing birds by this arrangement of feathers. She liked the plan, and had some choice specimens of this simple art hanging against her walls. She had a few shelves, with a few books,—of which more anon; a few painted cane chairs, and a table or two; and there was always a large beaupot, as the style was then, upon the chimney-piece. A bullfinch in a bright golden cage, a tiny green paroquet in another, were her pets and companions; and when the casement was open, and the sun glinted upon the leaves and flowers in the garden beyond, and the fresh wind from the heathy regions around shook the garlands of passion-flower that hung over it, you would have said



this little closet was a temple not unworthy to enshrine the nymph, with slight, elastic form, rich, abundant hair, and most lovely, embrowned face, that was to be seen engaged therein.

I spoke of her books, and I told you I should say something more upon that subject.

There were books upon those little shelves most rarely eloquent, most dangerously seductive to the imagination and the heart. The Angel of Evil had in those days indeed assumed the semblance of an Angel of Light; he had decked his insinuating tongue with all the beauty which imagination can lend to the seductions of passion; he had adorned his teachings with all the loveliness of tenderness, and exalted every virtue which can exist where due control over the tender passions exists not: he had named himself Rousseau.

Never had gifts been more noble; never had pen been more endowed with that delightful power which charms mankind to love and virtue; and never was there a more signal instance of the errors—shall I say crimes?—into which mistakes with regard to right principles may lead.

She knew well what her father thought of Rousseau; and while he read his "*Contrat Social*" and his "Botany," her attention was rivetted upon the pages of the "*Nouvelle Héloïse*." Rous-

seau has passed his own sentence upon this his favourite book. It is lamentable to what false views of duty, virtue, and true generosity of heart, this—the German works of the day—and the study of Mary Wolstoncroft, led this ardent-minded girl; and the misfortune of all was, that, owing to the extreme seclusion in which she lived, not only were her ideas totally uncorrected by communication with the actual world, but they mostly lay entirely concealed within her own breast. Not even her father had the slightest idea of the true state of her mind,—of the extent to which, in the simplicity of her heart, she carried out, or the perfect sincerity with which she adhered to, the opinions she had adopted. Men are often astonished when they see women, in the generous honesty of their nature, prepared to act upon, and to carry to their extremest consequences, the notions and theories they have themselves too carelessly suffered them to imbibe.

Mrs. Opie's two beautiful stories of the "Father and Daughter" and the "Mother and Daughter," may serve to shew what was the tendency of the female mind in those days, and to warrant me in saying, that though Miriam carried out her opinions to their very utmost extent, hers was not an individual case of mistaken and misdirected enthusiasm.

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I love to trace effects to their causes. To analyse human principles of action, and to detail the effect of circumstances and ideas upon the forming character; but the results are often deeply painful, and on some occasions repulsive. I shall pass rather hurriedly from scene to scene of this part to what it is necessary to the purport of my tale that I should tell.

There was at this time, resident in a small village, about three miles on the opposite side of Kettlewell, an extremely learned man, an excellent classic, and so forth, and so far mentally accomplished in every way. He had been curate of the place, and he took pupils—that is, he read with young gentlemen of more fortune than industry, who wanted to be stuffed for the University, or to be crammed to take a degree.

Raw young gentlemen they mostly were who came down into the mountains to profit by his assistance; but sometimes he had inmates of a superior order and riper age.

Men, who had disdained or neglected to profit by the means of education afforded them in their boyhood and early youth, and who, when called upon to figure in some eminent position in life—

forced forward by circumstances and their own abilities, had discovered their wants before it was quite too late, and had hastily seized upon the opportunity to complete their education afforded by the assistance of a mind so accomplished in matters of this description as was that of Mr. Abel.

The summer in which Miriam completed her nineteenth year brought a person of this description to Askridge.

Those were bad times in many respects — I hope and I believe very different from those we now live in ; neither public schools nor universities are yet what they ought to be, but the progress made has still, I trust, been very considerable indeed.

This young man, of whom I speak, was now between six and seven-and-twenty ; he was the son of a man of very large landed property, which had descended to him I know not how, and have never inquired ; all I know is, — and it is necessary to mention it, because I think this was one of the many circumstances which exercised a sinister effect upon the son, — that the father was what in vulgar language would be called the first gentleman of the family : in other words, he had been brought up in obscurity, with very slender expectations, and had been engaged in some ordinary occupation or profession, I never

heard what; when suddenly he inherited this large landed property — became possessor of a very fine house and park, of stables and horses, pictures and gardens, and sent his son to Harrow and to Cambridge.

To go to Harrow and to Cambridge was then no such undistinguishing distinction as it is now. People in the middle class of life were at that time very proud indeed of such things; and people very ignorant of the world, and naturally vain and fond of display, were delighted to have their sons associating with the sons of noblemen or the genuine old gentry of the country.

And it was grievous to observe at what very great sacrifices they were sometimes content to obtain such distinction; or how little they seemed to care in what the time was really spent, provided it was passed in such unquestionably high company.

At that time of day, the young leaders of society had very different habits of thought from what prevail among them, I believe and hope, now. The distinction of personal merit, or of individual acquirements, was not only uncoveted, but, worse, the attempt to acquire mental accomplishments by study was regarded with a sort of contemptuous indifference. Nay, there was with the majority actually a prejudice against such

efforts, when associated with persons of rank and fashion, which, to those whose memories extend not so far, will happily appear incredible. To drive carriages fitted up like stage-coaches, tandems and randoms; to drink to the greatest excess, and to defy all the principles of pure morality; were esteemed the true marks of a man of spirit. Conduct more regular was stigmatised as a proof of cowardice of mind or feebleness of constitution; and to this false standard of excellence numbers were sacrificed from among the emulous, the ardent, and the daring, who, had their aims been but well directed, might have aspired to the highest things.

Ridley was born with strong passions, a hot, indocile temper, and "the imagination of fire;" but to this, unhappily, he added "the heart of ice." By the time he was five-and-twenty, profligacy of life, selfish indulgence, the misdirected pride of his parents, and his own mistaken ambition, had produced one of those beings, born, if they achieve greatness, to be a snare and a terror; if they are insignificant, to be hated and despised.

He was a remarkably handsome, and an extremely clever young man. His spirits were lively to wildness, his manners charmingly easy and polished, his wit poignant, his tenderness when he assumed, or in the various changes of his

temperament felt the influence, most seductive. He was admired, flattered, and courted, wherever he went.

His father thought no expense too lavish for such a son; his mother only counselled him to outdo, as his fortune privileged him, all his companions in expense; and upon no account whatsoever to suffer any one, whatever might be his claims, to outshine him in this respect. When at home, every sentiment and opinion was regarded as the voice of an oracle—for he knew the world, and his parents certainly did not. Everything around him was only arranged and regulated as might best accord with his taste; not a wish he could form that it was possible to gratify was left ungratified; the comforts, desires, or wants of no human creature, were suffered to come in competition with his.

In the little world of home, indeed, he was the sole object of every one; he was accustomed to regard the slightest inconvenience to which he might be subjected, as an evil the most to be deprecated by all the world. His most trifling indisposition was a matter of the most serious importance. His word was law, and his happiness and welfare the aim, and almost the sole aim, of every creature that surrounded him.

His heart, not naturally insensible, grew as hard as the nether millstone.

Some generous natures there are which actually expand into gratitude, and warm, heartfelt affection, under this terrific trial of unrestrained indulgence and unchecked prosperity; but rare and exceptional are such cases, and where the reverse occurs the result is frightful.

He ran his career at school and college, not bad enough to be hated, but far too clever to be despised; brilliant in his follies, seductive in his vices, admired where he was not esteemed, courted where he could not be loved. He was not so much worse than others as to alarm either himself or his friends; he only went as far out of the course as the wildest of the young men about him did, and he never was known to express regret for any thing he might have done.

He had no relentings of remorse or pity for the victims that had strewed his path; he had no standard of excellence within by which to compare his grievous fallings from rectitude; he seemed to have no just ideas of responsibility; his time, his fortune, his talents, his gifts—he looked upon as exclusively his own,—possessions which he had *a right* to dispense as



seemed him best—and his best was what he liked best.

A final account—a Master invisible—law—duty, were to him vain words—words never even thought of: humanity, pity, remorse, regret for suffering frailty abused, or evil actions committed, were equally strangers to his bosom.

By the time he was twenty-five years of age, beautiful, gay, brilliant, pleasant, sensible, well-bred, and attractive as he was, if he had been justly weighed and valued, he would have been called a very bad man. At this age, one of those sudden changes in parties and politics, which deaths or vacancies occasion among some of the leaders of the world, had brought him, who had been now a couple of years in parliament, suddenly into notice. A brilliant speech, just at some most opportune moment, disclosed his abilities and his value, and Ridley found himself at once elevated to a lofty and most distinguished position. He was utterly, hopelessly, blind to his own moral, but he was far too sagacious to be insensible to his intellectual wants. He felt that he wanted the required knowledge, the sound acquirements, the reading, which is necessary to make a leading man in these latter days, however great be the natural powers. He made his inquiries, and the result was that during the

recess he came down to read with Mr. Abel, at Askridge.

Mr. Abel was a long, lean, ungraceful man, slow in his speech, yet fond of speaking, which peculiarities render a man not exactly an agreeable companion; and he was not in the least in the habit of doing violence to his own somewhat peculiar ways, in order to lighten the dulness of Askridge to those who lived with him as his pupils. He took an immensity of pains with them in his study; was the most invaluable, persevering, and conscientious of instructors; but the readings terminated, and the study door closed behind them, he never exerted himself in the slightest degree, either to rescue the young men confided to his care from the tedium of life in this retired place, to watch over their conduct, or improve their principles.

The consequence was, that the gay unchecked spirits of youth, the hunger for excitement common to its years, and the want of amusement in any legitimate form, became a great snare to these pupils; and for want of something better to do the hours of recreation were very apt to become hours of mischief.

The morality of the little town was not benefited by the neighbourhood of Mr. Abel; who, a good and a well-meaning man himself, was

nevertheless the occasion of innumerable evils by the license which sprung from his easy and indolent temper.

The arrival, however, of a man of Mr. Ridley's age and abilities aroused him in some degree. The conversation with one so accomplished was a pleasure to which he could not be indifferent, and instead of allowing him to follow his own devices when the hours of study were over—perfectly careless whether he was amused or not—he exerted himself to bear him company, invited himself to a share in the walks which Ridley, during the genial weather of a most lovely summer, amused himself, by taking in the mountains—pointed out to him every lovely spot which lay nestling in these fastnesses, and every towering peak from which a prospect more than commonly beautiful might be commanded. Ridley had far too much good taste and good sense not to profit by Mr. Abel's inclination to be sociable. The speech of the good man was tedious, but wanted not meaning, and he was not altogether without a wit, or more properly, humour of his own; his love, also, for the picturesque amounted to enthusiasm; and thus, though at times Ridley, accustomed to more exciting pleasures, thought his sojourn in

the mountains but “slow work,” upon the whole he got along, as he thought, very well, made rapid advances in knowledge, and learned almost as much in these sociable rambles among the hills as in Mr. Abel’s study.

## CHAPTER III.

“A crowd of hopes . . .  
Fluttered about my senses and my soul ;  
. . . . And all kinds of thought,  
That verged upon them sweeter than the dream  
Dreamt by a happy man.” TENNYSON.

THE master and the pupil came clambering down the steepest of these hills, their dress a good deal soiled, and their knees stained with the dust of the rugged places through which they had been scrambling. Mr. Abel, who was awkward in the extreme, had had sundry falls ; and Ridley, laughing within himself in a peculiar silent way which he had when amused, had as often picked him up and set him on his legs again.

But, to tell truth, he was beginning at last to get a little weary of his walks with Mr. Abel, and, as variety was the very element upon which he existed, to wish for the change and liberty of wandering quite alone, and extending his excur-

sions as far as he pleased, unfettered by any companion.

He had dragged poor Mr. Abel this day much farther than it was his wont to go, indifferent, according to custom, to the comfort of others when his own inclinations were concerned; but he now, like other selfish people, began to regret his thoughtless disregard of other men's comfort when the consequences became inconvenient to himself; and poor Mr. Abel, with his dusty coat and stained knees — tottering along, sliding down steep places, tumbling into holes, and at length utterly wearied out and almost unable to get along, and little inclined to lighten the way by his conversation — was felt as a great hindrance, burden, or *bore* (as the phrase was), and Ridley heartily wished to be rid of him.

The way they had taken led them to the brow of the hills, or rather mountains, which I have described. The wide, breezy common opened suddenly before them, now covered with purple ling and large straggling bushes of golden gorse and broom; and the cottage of the Recluse, with its trim garden-hedge, its parterres gay with a full flush of roses and other summer-flowers, lay, like a little island of the blest, under their feet.

Mr. Abel had just before been declaring that

he did not exactly know where he was, and that he must sit down and rest himself before proceeding further, when, as they turned round the prominence of rock which hid this landscape from their sight, the cottage stood revealed to them, and he uttered a loud holla of joy, exclaiming, —

“ Only to think of our being here, after all ! ”

He seemed inspired with fresh vigour, and began to stumble down the mountain at a rapid pace.

He did not take the trouble even to turn his head, or explain his intentions to his companion. He was one of those who, once possessed with an idea, seem to believe in a magnetic power of communication without signs. But Ridley was content, so that he did but get along a little more swiftly than usual, and followed him as well as he could at his own pace, every now and then, however, stopping to look about him.

It *was* an evening — an evening for a poet, —

“ Oh, 't was an unimaginable sight !

Clouds, mists, streams, watery rocks, and emerald turf ;

Clouds of all tincture, rocks, and sapphire sky,

Confused, commingled, mutually inflamed,

Molten together and composing thus,

Each lost in each — a marvellous array ! . . . .

In fleecy folds voluminous enwapt . . . .

Such as by Hebrew prophets was beheld in vision,” &c.

Snatches of this gorgeous description, taken from the second book of that wondrously beautiful poem, Wordsworth's "Excursion," which Ridley had been just reading, and which his marvellous memory retained without difficulty, were the words in which he, with some slight alterations, endeavoured to arrange the impressions received from the scene before him.

It was a plain which lay extended there, round which the mountains in giant heights rose in a grand semicircle, the purple heath stretching towards the horizon, with the picturesque low-roofed cottage beneath his feet. Above him the sky, sapphire overhead; but the heavy clouds of a late thunderstorm were still rolling in thick volumes towards the distance, inundated at this moment with bright dazzling lights from the sun, now sinking in a bed of crimson and gold.

His imagination was inflammable as his heart was hard; and an imagination excited by natural beauty will for the moment give a glow of most honest pleasure to the countenance, and a fervid expression to the eyes; and Ridley, who had fascination at will, never looked more fascinating than when, without any ideas of being fascinating or any thing else of the sort in his head, he presented himself with Mr. Abel at the little wicket of the garden.



As Mr. Abel was silent, he would not question him, and following him without speaking into the charming little enclosure, walked after him up the gravel walk, eyeing, with eyes of desire, the fine strawberries that peeped from under their leaves, and the strings (as Wordsworth has it) of ripe red and white currants that hung from the trees, not overlooking the low bushes covered with roses of every shade, from the deepest crimson to the palest blush, and all the abundance of stocks, rockets, and lilies intermingled.

A dog behind the cottage barked, and the handsomest gipsy, as Ridley thought, that he had ever seen, thus summoned, came to the door, and spying Mr. Abel, hastened down the walk and gave him a most friendly and cordial greeting.

“My father is out, but will be at home soon. Pray come in, dear Mr. Abel!—it is months since we have had a sight of you. My father will be so glad to see you!”

There were few forms observed among these good people. Mr. Abel in his absence of mind, looking about him at all the pretty things around, forgot to present his companion, who, however, as he saw his tutor about to enter the house without taking any notice of him, quietly said,—

“May I come in too?”

“Oh, I vow I quite forgot you!” said Abel,

turning abruptly round. "Miss Miriam, this is Mr. Ridley, a gentleman now staying to read with me."

"Pray walk in, sir," said Miriam, "and rest yourself. My father will be home soon."

So they walked into the parlour and sat down by the window, and Miriam said she would get them some fruit if they pleased. So for this purpose she left them to themselves to look about them, and Ridley to make his own observations and remarks.

"I declare, Abel," was the first thing he said, "you are the strangest fellow in the world to bring me up here, without note of preparation, into the prettiest garden of the houris that ever fancy of man formed, and to startle me with the sight of the handsomest gipsy that ever was tanned by a summer sun! Who is she, and what is she?"

"Why, I don't know why I should tell you, when I wanted breath to speak. There is nothing very extraordinary in calling upon a friend to sit down and rest one's self when one finds one's self, after a long tiresome walk, coming plump upon his cottage. That young girl is his daughter: she's a very good girl, I believe, and he's very fond of her. I never observed she was particularly handsome."

“Didn’t you? yet I suppose she must be reckoned so by the whole county?”

“Can’t say, I’m sure; yet I may have heard them talk about it, though I don’t think I ever did. But her father’s a curious fellow. They don’t go much about among the people here, I believe; he’s a very clever man is her father—quite above the common in every way.”

“And who’s her mother?” asked Ridley, as people do who are accustomed to take note of alliances.

“She’s got none.”

“But I suppose she had one?”

“I believe so, but she was dead long before I got the living and came down here. She lives with her father alone here, and really seems a very good girl. I never come here but she offers me fruit, or cake, or wine, or some little thing. She’s a hospitable, kind, open-hearted creature, as ever lived.”

“She’s excessively handsome,” persisted Ridley.

“Well, I dare say she may be, but I never thought about it. I know she’s good, and I’ve heard her father say she’s very clever—as good a little classic as you would wish to see, and fond of reading all his big books: but I’ve no very particular liking for scholars in petticoats. Why, sir, when they’ve done their best, a schoolboy in

the fourth form will beat them hollow ; and it only makes the frivolous things pert and conceited : though I must own Miriam's as free from conceit—as free-hearted, frank, and charming a girl, as need be.”

Ridley had been examining a little book which lay half-open, tossed upon the window-seat, as if she had been reading it when interrupted by the dog.

He smiled in a sarcastic manner as he turned over half-a-dozen of the pages ; then laid down the book, and leaned his full length out of the open window, gazing into the garden, where birds were tripping about in perfect security amid the plants and flowers ; bees were humming amid the waxen flower cups, and butterflies flaunting about in the sun ; and he felt in a delicious sort of dream as he watched the slight figure of Miriam among the trees at the bottom of the garden, with a basket in her hand, gathering currants and strawberries.

He watched the fair figure, and he mused upon the book, and the clever sarcastic smile peculiar to his expressive and handsome face was upon it now.

When she re-entered the house, he drew himself again into the room, and stood with his back to the window, observing every thing that went on.

She came in with her basket in her hand, looking still more handsome from the glow that was upon her cheek, and she set down the basket before Mr. Abel, invited the stranger to take a share, which he civilly accepted, going up to the table and helping himself with his hand; but he refused to sit down, and resumed his position of observer at the window. So she, without taking further notice of him, sat down by Mr. Abel, and began to talk to him in as free and unconcerned a manner as if there had been no other person in the room.

She seemed to have no feeling of such a thing as timidity or shyness -- like the birds of the wilderness which fear not the face of men -- but her ease was so perfectly natural, her manner so entirely guileless and unaffected, her look so girlish and simple, that any suspicion of undue forwardness or boldness never entered the beholder's thoughts.

She evidently talked to Mr. Abel with much pleasure, and her conversation, neither trifling nor conventional, soon took an earnest and serious turn, as they picked currants together, and talked of—

“Hobbes, Malbranche, and Locke.”

Perhaps not literally of these great metaphysicians' works, but something very much akin to it.

Ridley stood with his back to the window, gazing and listening—listening and gazing; and the peculiar smile passed often over his features, as he heard the sentiments expressed by the young and animated speaker, who “spoke like a sage,” but evidently “felt like a man,”—or rather woman.

If she had not been so beautiful a girl, Ridley would have set her down for the veriest pedant that ever inked her fingers; and looked upon her as a thing equally unnatural and odious. But beauty redeems every defect in the eyes of such a man as he was; and he began to long to break a lance with the young *philosophess* himself.

The opportunity was soon afforded; the wicket again opened, and her father—the Recluse himself—came slowly and pensively up the garden. Ridley had turned round upon hearing the latch raised, and he watched the figure of the remarkable-looking man as he approached.

Lines of deep, earnest thought had marked one of the finest faces he thought he had ever seen; and the habit of manual labour and close reading united had slightly bent the figure; the step was slow, but it was not languid; the air gentle, almost might be called lounging; but there was an appearance of *radical* strength, if I may so express myself, of tone—of sensibility—of

vehement passion, if aroused—which in spite of all was impressed upon the observer—he could scarcely tell why.

Perhaps these last perceptions arose as Ridley knew him better; but the deeply-curved and thoughtful expression of the countenance struck him from the first.

He came slowly up the walk, stopping from time to time to look at and handle some of his flowers, taking out his garden-knife and giving a pruning touch here and there; but looking up towards the house, and seeing a gentleman standing at the window, he started, and with a brisk step and an air of friendly greeting, approached the cottage.

“Abel! Right glad to see you,” was his address, holding out his hand, and approaching the table, whence Abel reared with toil his mighty limbs, and with the iron grasp of a giant clutched the fair white hand presented to him.

“Right glad to see you also, friend, and the fair Miss Miriam here, looking as well as ever. We are devouring your currants and strawberries you see; but it’s hugely hot, and I am as tired as if I had ascended Mont Blanc. Yes—yes, that’s my friend Mr. Ridley,—Mr. Feversham—Mr. Ridley—a gentleman who is come down to spend a little time with me. I must hardly call him

pupil, I believe—for he can teach me a vast deal more of the world I don't know, than I can teach him of the world I do know."

Upon this introduction the Recluse turned to Mr. Ridley, and addressing him with a manner which shewed him, though retired from, yet no stranger to the habits of the great world—they soon fell into a general conversation, in which Miriam joined, with what may be called a sort of artless assurance, for she was perfectly at her ease, and spoke her opinions upon every subject with the most unaffected freshness. She seemed original and odd, but certainly there was nothing in the least repulsive or unpleasant in this openness; she was so perfectly free from vanity, so evidently without any idea of making a display, her whole deportment so characterised by the most limpid single-heartedness and simplicity.

She stood by her father, and she held his hand while he talked, and while the others talked; while she put in her word with her speaking eyes full of earnest expression and interest.

Mr. Feversham seemed pleased with his new acquaintance. It was seldom that in his retirement he met with such a companion. The four men I have enumerated—the surgeon, the lawyer, the vicar, and Mr. Abel—were the only people in Kettlewell, Askridge, or its immediate neigh-



bourhood, that could make the slightest pretension to the possession of minds able to excite or interest his. The young pupils who came to Mr. Abel's from time to time were merely raw boys, but here was a formed and very clever man—a man who had just quitted the great world of science, literature, and politics—and who was, moreover, one of the cleverest persons he had ever met with.

They soon strolled out into the garden. Miriam still held her father's hand,—it was thus they might always be seen together; but Miriam talked no longer herself. Her eyes were soon busily engaged in gazing, now at the stranger, then at her father, as they severally spoke—her ears in drinking in everything that was said—and she gradually sank into perfect silence.

Her eyes were but too earnestly employed. She knew she had never seen—in her dreams of perfection and perfectibility she thought she had never even imagined, a being so perfect as the one before her. He became to her the realisation, but with a something yet exceeding in excellence, the ideal of that St. Preux—that Emile,—over whom her fancy had brooded. His conversation was this day particularly clever and animated, and he kept glancing at the fine girl who now silently walked there, holding her father's hand,

as if he asked her approbation, and relied upon her comprehension of what he said, and her sympathy in it.

She felt gratified and flattered in a way she had never done before. They had at first sauntered up and down the middle walk of the garden—now they deviated into the narrower paths that ran round it, where the hedge upon one side was high and filled with wild roses and sweet-briers scenting the air, and the path was bordered upon the other with ancient apple-trees loaded with fruit, that spread their hoary branches overhead, and pear-trees cut in pinnacles between them,—also loaded with fruit, and giving a pleasant quaintness to the scene.

Here the party was obliged to walk two by two. Mr. Abel and Mr. Feversham walked together in advance, absorbed in the discussion of some subject or other, and Ridley and Miriam followed side by side.

She had never felt any thing the least approaching to the feelings with which she found herself now agitated,—

A timidity to which, till then, she had been a perfect stranger—a feeling, till then unknown, of admiration and pleasure—a sense of gratified self-love never felt before—a delight in the perception that she possessed the power to please, which had

never, until now, in one single instance been excited.

All those feelings, in short, which belong to a heart most pure and unsophisticated, whose affections have never been stirred by any thing in the least approaching to passion, and yet whose imagination, filled with images of perfection, is but too ready to lend its delusions to the actual when it appears.

Too well read in the dangerous subject she was, and yet, such was the perfect innocence of her heart, that she had not the remotest idea of what was really taking birth within—for she was far too simple-hearted to think much about herself, and she had never been taught to call herself to account. She was, at least, free from egotism, if she wanted self-correction; she had, what all have not—the virtues of her faults.

Ridley was very much better aware than she was of the impression he was making; he was of course flattered, and he was, moreover, very much attracted. He certainly had never met with any one the least resembling Miriam before. He thought her gipsy complexion, and her earnest, expressive, serious eyes, at once most singular and most interesting. He did his best to be as interesting upon his side, and was as charming as he could be for his life. He succeeded but too well.

The father turned round and looked back now and then ; and, under the hoary branches of those apple-trees, and the pinnacled avenue of those pear-trees, and that sweet-brier and wild-rose hedge, he saw them walking. He, bending his head towards her, looking most handsome and animated ; and she, turning up those glorious eyes of hers to his face, and answering in tones too low and sweet to reach far.

And Mr. Feversham said to Abel,—

“Tell me something more about that young man—he seems a clever person—a remarkable man he will be in time, if I mistake not.”

And Abel answered,—

“He is a very clever man, and is expected to take a very leading part in politics—premier, in course of time, some say. But he wants reading—he wants reading ; without reading, the cleverest man upon earth is but half a man after all.”

“I am surprised at what you tell me ; boys of ability usually love reading so well that they educate themselves in this respect, nobody exactly knows how.”

“So it is not, however, in this case ; though, of course, he has got a good deal of stuff into his head altogether, some way or other : but he has wasted his time—wasted his time. It is impossible a man who had not wasted time, having been

at a public school and at Cambridge, could else have done so little."

The Recluse shook his head. He thought very little of a university education: he was of those who are seeking perfection at the expense of all existing things. You must excuse him—he lived in the ideas of his day.

A doubt as to the value of a university education always made Abel, who was an excellent classic and mathematician, angry. He knew, by what he had gained himself, what was to be gained in those seats of learning by those willing to profit by such advantages. So he said,—

"Those who learn nothing where so much may be learned, are, I repeat it, either idle or worse."

The father again turned round, and looked back. They were further off than before, and more earnestly engaged in talk than ever.

"Worse!—vicious, do you mean? Has that been the case with this young man?"

"Not that I know of, I am sure," said the good-natured and most short-sighted Abel, —  
"no; he seems as good and well-behaved a young fellow as ever I saw in my life. He has been most assiduous at his books since he came to me. By what he lets out in his talk, too fond of tandem-driving, maybe, while at the university,

and of suppers with other young fellows ; natural enough—natural enough !—wasted his time !—they all do—they all do !—wants a reform—wants a reform !”

“ Do you know any thing of his parents ?”

“ People of good fortune, but nothing very great, I believe, in other ways. Good sort of foolish people, I fancy, who let the young man do much as he pleases. It accounts for it all—it accounts for it all.”

And by this time, for they had stood still as this was said, the young people joined them ; and then the parties changed—Abel and Miriam walked forwards first, and the father and Ridley followed.

This time, voluntarily or involuntarily, he took more than ordinary pains to render himself agreeable. He charmed Mr. Feversham by his agreeable powers, he excited his admiration by the brilliance and solidity of his remarks, and he flattered him, in the most seductive manner, by his accordance with most of his peculiar opinions. He spoke too so justly and so well upon points of morals—alas ! who cannot ?—that by the time they sat down to tea, for they were much too well pleased with each other to part before it was absolutely necessary, Ridley had managed to win for himself as high a place in the opinion of the

father as in the admiration of the daughter ; and this sort of agreeable consciousness, as they sat round the table, added, if it were possible to add, to the pleasing fascination of his manners.

Miriam made tea, and the kettle had to be fetched up and down from the kitchen. She used to do this for herself—nothing could be more simple than their mode of life—they always waited upon themselves ; Peggy, the maid, had plenty to do without attending upon them. She set tea as usual, and then she took herself to her other employments, so Ridley attended to fetch the kettle first, and then insisted upon carrying it, and then upon going up and down to fetch it, and all in such a pleasant, easy way, that, in spite of the fashionable air of his dress, Mr. Feversham took him for as great a despiser of luxury and parade as himself.

Then the sun set in glory, and then the moon rose in hers, “leaning against the mountains’ breast,” and then the stars came forth from out the depths of heaven, and then the missel-thrush and the reed-bird began their evening-song, and then all was still and exquisitely calm. And the party walked together out at the wicket, for Abel had asked them whether they would not accompany him and his friend part of the way home that fine night—but as they gazed upon the

glittering stars, who among them worshipped Him of whom "the heavens declare the glory?"

Mr. Abel and his friend were soon perfectly absorbed in a dispute concerning the calculation of the times of the expected comet, and Ridley walked again behind with Miriam, and his voice was very low and sweet. True, he said nothing that had meaning, if the words merely were repeated, but her heart began to flutter at the tones. Then they came to the dark shadowy entrance of that mountain-gorge, through which the path of the two visitors lay, and there they parted.

Abel and Mr. Feversham, hesitating and returning, and still saying more last words to each other, before they could resolve to separate; and Ridley—for she had given him her hand in artless confidence—again and again, as they came back for "more last words," taking that hand, and repeating his farewells and his assurances, that, if permitted, he should speedily renew the delights of this, the most charming evening of his life.

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The father and daughter walked back in silence: he absorbed in the endeavour to repeat in his head, without the aid of figures, the calcula-



tions upon which his reasonings had been founded, and, as usual with him upon such occasions, almost entirely insensible to the presence of his daughter ; and she, no longer holding his hand according to almost unbroken custom, lingering behind him, now gazing at the glorious empyrean above, now at the sleeping landscape around, in a sweet confusion of delightful sensations, which she neither attempted to analyse nor to understand.

Had the severance of the holy tie which united them already begun ?

## CHAPTER IV.

“ Ecco io n'chino le braccia, et' appresento  
Senza difesa il petto—or che nol fiedi ?  
Vuoi ch' agevoli l 'opra ?—I' son contento.”

TASSO.

THE pure love of a guileless heart is a lovely picture, worthy to be displayed before the eye of God and man—an emanation from the beneficent source of all good—a holy law of this our fleeting being, knitting together, in ties indissoluble as strong, two hearts, two souls, in one.

Its birth is lovely, its progress most interesting—its fate, be it for weal or for woe, the source of the deepest pathos or most rapturous joy. Not so with love unholy and vicious. Let its progress be shrouded in darkness, for from the powers of darkness it takes rise, and to darkness it shall return. Offspring of evil, with evil let it perish.

I am not here to trace its progress.

With the bitter, bitter consequences of misdirected passion, I have once had before to do, and I now have to do again. Then it was of hearts betrayed by their own unguarded tenderness, and the picture might be viewed, at least, without disgust—now it is far worse.

Unsuspecting enthusiasm, innocence unguided and inexperienced, a most loving heart, a most frank and confiding temper, is exposed to the fascinations of a most profligate, unprincipled, yet most clever man, full of imagination, exhibiting fits of the most seductive tenderness—a tenderness which he almost for the moment believed he felt—yet with an utter contempt for the sex, despising all principle in relation to them, and far—far too heartless to reflect upon the bitter, irretrievable misery and ruin, which his footsteps, in such courses, might leave behind. Execrable selfishness! odious, barbarous cruelty! wicked, dishonourable abuse of confidence and weakness! Oh, for a blasting pen!—for words that blighted as they fell!—to stigmatise the base seducer of a woman's innocence!—the miserable betrayer of those who have trusted!—the wretched author of sorrows, endless as they are bitter!

Miriam learned to love with a depth, a force,

an enthusiasm, a passion, and a purity, which justified to herself, alas ! all the fatal errors into which her passion led her.

She, poor thing ! had been reared in all that freedom and security which her life with Nature, her simple enjoyments and her simple affections, had inspired : but her imagination was unchastened, her enthusiasm undirected, and unrestrained by severe laws of duty—of woman's more especial duty. With no principles of religion that were not as fleeting, varying, and evanescent as the other dreams of her imagination ; no awful standard of purity—no moral law imposing its irrevocable boundaries to the wild exaggerations of the passions—she stood there without defence, against this wily, practised man of a bad and vicious world.

He came there very often—he came there more and more often.

Her father became uneasy.

There are occasions upon which he, whose opinions have run into the greatest eccentricity, returns to the standard of ordinary men. Whatever his theories might be, no man upon earth was more susceptible upon the point of female honour than was Feversham. It was some time before, absorbed and abstracted as he too often was, he suspected the approach of danger ; but

when once suspicion had entered his mind, it was enough.

After a slight explanation with Ridley, he forbade him his house. He was unfortunate even in this, apparently indispensable, measure. He who would confide in the rectitude of his children, had need to rear them in higher principles than those vague generalisations of which Feversham was so fond; he must humble his own pride of intellect, and bend before One whose laws are not as men's laws—who addresses and regulates the inner heart—who speaks to the wild waves of passion, and “there is a great calm”—whose voice is ever present, whispering to those who will listen—whose obligations are stringent, and His denunciations awful.

It was easy for a man like Ridley to plead, what all men, even the best of them, are perhaps too apt to plead, even when pursuing an honest passion, the superiority of the rights of love over all other rights—its obligations above all other duties—to exalt its equivocal sacrifices into the most generous of sacrifices—and to represent its breach of all other obligations—its treachery to holy affections—its oblivion of other claims, as proofs of the most generous devotion and calls upon the most unbounded gratitude.

Men, in their cooler moments, think and feel like the old senator in "Othello,"—

"Look to her, Moor! . . .

She has deceived her father, and may thee."

But their language is too often as false as their pleadings are sophistical, and woe to the woman who builds her claims upon her lover's good faith and constancy, by the extent of those duties she has sacrificed in his favour!

The first step in wrong to which Miriam was persuaded, was that of deceiving her father.

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It was easy for Ridley to arrange one of those tales which have deluded so many generous and devoted hearts—to represent the impossibility of yielding to her father's expectations of an open and immediate marriage without offending his own parents past forgiveness, and ruining the bright prospects opening before him. He talked of a private marriage, which he owned it was vain to propose to her father, "whose opinions upon the subject were more conventional than he should have expected from one of so enlarged and liberal a way of thinking." He persuaded

her by professions of the most ardent devotion—by all those sophistical arguments which such men use, and such inexperienced and generous girls believe—of the disinterestedness of his passion, and the violence of his despair at the idea of a final separation. And many an evening saw that once faithful and ingenuous girl gliding, with beating heart, along the garden-hedge, to the place where he hid his letters; reading them with all the intense interest of a first love, ready to cast her own fate at once, without regard to self, a sacrifice to the interests of her lover. It was not difficult to persuade her that her father, in spite of his apparent obstinacy upon the point, could not but regard the *indefeasible rights of love* in the same light that so many enthusiasts of his day affected to—or without affectation did regard them—that, in short, under that sacred name all would, as all ought to be, forgiven.

“Had not her father himself put Mary Wolstoncroft’s ‘Letters from Norway’ into her hands, and eulogised them as the expression of the purest and most devoted tenderness?” Miriam, it is true, had never been made aware by him of the circumstances under which those letters had been written, and to whom; but Ridley enlightened her upon that matter, and did not

neglect to draw his own inferences from the circumstance.

He talked of a private marriage ; but he had not the slightest intention of linking himself in the transient enthusiasm of the moment—how transient such enthusiasm his own experience had but too well taught him—to one in rank and fortune so inferior to himself. To entangle himself, as yet, in any marriage at all, was contrary to all his plans and wishes ; but to fetter himself with such a chain, unless as the means of securing for himself important worldly advantages, he would have thought the very climax of absurdity and folly. Yet he really did love this interesting creature, as much as it was possible for one so world-hardened to love.

And in the heart-breaking scene of their parting—when she, abandoned to all the agonies of grief, yet, generous and self-devoted, insisted upon his obedience to his father's commands, and proved herself resolved to encounter any suffering rather than be an impediment in the brilliant career of glory and prosperity opening to him—when he saw her dashing away the tears that kept crowding up into her eyes, almost convulsed with the effort to keep down her sobs and her shrieks ; yet assuring him, “ that it was all right—that she should be able to keep up



very well—that she would and could live upon those precious letters which every evening, as the busy day of his course came to a close, he promised, and *intended*, to write to her.”

In that heart-rending scene, when, after innumerable last adieus, they at length parted, and, turning back, he saw her, when she thought herself alone, fling herself down upon the grass, her arms stretched out in all the agony of that despair which she had so generously endeavoured to conceal from him,—yes, in that moment he softened too—softened, as he thought, almost as much as she did; and as he tore himself away, he vowed to his own soul that Miriam should not be wronged; that the time should come when that heart, more pure than tried gold, should find the recompense of its ardent and generous devotion: that he would soon find means to visit her again, and restore the sweet sunshine to that honest affectionate countenance; and that, sooner or later, she should occupy with him the place in society of which he so well understood, but which, in her enthusiasm and simplicity, she so little comprehended, the value.

From the point where he turned to look back he watched her; he felt as if he could not tear himself thus away: he returned a few steps; he heard her groan—such a groan!—such utter anguish

in that groan! His better angel—all men have their better angel; long lingers the celestial visitant before it finally takes flight—his better angel urged him to come back, to catch that forlorn and betrayed one, that generous, affectionate, loving heart to his, and to ratify before God and society those hallowed bonds which united them to each other.

It was the turning-point of his destiny.

The choice which, in holy mystery, legend, or fable, since the world began, has been pictured to man.

But the evil counsellor within triumphed: the tempter whispered of ridicule, obstruction, embarrassment—of a career too lofty to be interrupted by considerations so insignificant, in comparison with higher aspirations—of *another time*, when justice might be done. And he turned away and pursued the path which led to where the mail from Carlisle to London passed.

He pursued his journey; and as time and distance separated him from the scene where this romantic episode of his life had taken place, the passion of regret and remorse with which he had looked upon her, as there she lay prone upon the earth, in that agony of utter misery—she, whom he had once seen the picture of happiness and serenity—was forgotten: other thoughts,

plans, wishes, began to occupy his mind ; and before the mail rattled over the stones of London, Ridley might be called himself again.

Still Memory would have her revenge at times.

In many a still hour of the night, in many a moment of pause amidst the busy and interesting occupations of his daily life, those moments when the spirits sink, the imagination clouds, the heart of man grows sick within him, and the utter worthlessness of this *mere* world presses upon the immortal soul—that image would recur. The memory of that trusting, honest love, so wickedly betrayed, would haunt him ; and that face of repressed agony, and that last groan, rise up to his fancy, till the image and the sound seemed real.

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A few detached scenes shall put you in possession of as much of this part of my story as I think it necessary or choose to dwell upon.

To relate the ultimate consequences of this tragic tale of guilt and error has been my chief intention ; so that this portion is to be looked upon rather in the way of a sort of prelude or introduction to the rest, than as the story itself.

## CHAPTER V.

. . . . " He above the rest,  
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,  
Stood like a tower." MILTON.

A VERY full house, and a very important question before the house.

The times were times of strife, agitation, and revolution; when society was shaking to its foundations; when the first principles of religion, every tradition of manners, every axiom of government, every right, privilege, prescription, possession, was called in question.

When a strong man at the helm, with clear, absolute, determined views, stood there, almost alone, in defence of what *was*—of what time had hallowed, experience justified, and religion sanctified—against the brightest genuises of the age in which he lived, arrayed in the cause of what they esteemed more hallowed than antiquity,

more wise than experience, more saintly than religion.

There had this night been a desperate battle, and in vain the minister had called forth his eloquence as a flood: he stood alone. He was accustomed to stand alone—as some noble watch-tower, rising towards the heavens, looming in the threatening storm, and displaying its unquenchable light, to warn and guide the bewildered wayfarers around—a cynosure to which, in their blindness and their distractions, they fled. But he was more accustomed to overwhelm than to convince, to enlist the prejudices and the imaginations of men upon his side, than to defend his position by the powers of reason or the arguments of wisdom. Perhaps, at that time he was not even himself aware how much of wisdom there was in his opinions, how much of both in his anticipations.

He was accustomed, as I have said, to stand almost alone in that house, unsupported except by the *votes* of his adherents, which never failed him; but this night, exhausted with fatigue, his spirits ebbing and his nerves failing, he looked round as he sat down, contemplated the array of talent upon the benches opposite — sighed — and wished that he too had a supporter.

A young man, who had been sometimes, though

rarely, heard before, and that in brief and unimportant speeches,—a young man of most prepossessing appearance, handsome, gentlemanlike, with eagle eye and most energetic gesture, rose and made a speech in defence of the minister's measure, and in explanation of his views, which at once electrified the whole audience—that audience the hardest to satisfy, the most glorious to please, of any, that man, since the world began, has addressed.

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There stands Ridley, surrounded by congratulating friends, in the full blush of his triumphs. He has electrified the world. His speech will form an era in history,—he is already a great and powerful man,—a few hours, and he has reached the highest round of ambition's ladder.

He accepts a place of honour and eminence under the minister whose views he has so admirably illustrated and defended; henceforward he is to take a prominent part amid the phalanx which defends the constitution and the throne.

We need not follow him in this career.

We have all read of one who, after a political victory over her enemies, mounted her chariot to

return home . . . . Her father's dead body lay in the way.

Ridley returned home that evening, and a letter lay upon the writing-table with others. He knew the handwriting but too well ; it was a month since he had written one word in answer to these heart-rending epistles—these letters, where the struggle to conceal the anguish of the writer seemed but more faithfully to display the misery which could not be hidden.

He had taken already such measures as he thought her present position demanded ; he could be liberal enough of his *money*—and he was becoming weary of the subject, after having satisfied himself that he had done all which a man under his circumstances could be expected to do.

When nations were contending in the death-struggle, and worlds rushing into confusion, what was a broken heart, more or less, in a remote corner of the kingdom ?

He glanced over the letter, and flung it into the fire.

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The next day there was a grand political dinner, and a splendid entertainment in the evening, given by one of the reigning sovereigns of the world of fashion and politics united.

Ridley was the principal person at the dinner, and the star of the evening.

The long suite of apartments is blazing with innumerable lights, the pictorial walls are garlanded with wreaths of the most beautiful flowers, and hung with the richest silks, and corniced with gold. The music of the fine military bands is sounding through these lofty halls, and the steps of the gay dancers is heard.

It is a royal feast, and royalty is there.

And beautiful women — beautiful as angels — with their floating ærial drapery, their wreaths of flowers, their dazzling eyes like stars, and their most enchanting smiles.

And others gifted by fortune, yet not forgotten by nature — endowed with wealth that is fabulous — and with the best blood of England in their veins.

And he, Ridley, is the star of the evening.

It was enough to turn the steadiest head, but it did not turn his. Poor Miriam, could she have seen the unconcern with which, in this moment of triumph, he turned from the flashing eyes and dimpled smiles that greeted him, might have felt secure from the pangs of jealousy at least.

But follow him with your eye, as he walks with that air of simple dignity, and serene uncon-



cern, up the room, and look at the image before which he is about to fall down. He had received a hint upon the subject in some mysterious way.

It had been suggested that the immense fortune, and lofty station, and *blue* blood of the Lady Angelina would, added to his unquestionable talents, furnish all that could be wanting to render him one of the most powerful and influential men in the three kingdoms.

The Lady Angelina, whom time will make a countess in her own right, sat by her mother's side, with her fan in her hand, high amid the most exclusive—the *crème de la crème* of that aristocratic assemblage—with that air of callous indifference to all passing around which is by some assumed, either in pride or real apathy and coldness, as the best expression of unquestioned grandeur. But as Ridley approached the fan quivered, and those cold calm eyes fell, and a colour—rare visitant upon that face!—slowly defined itself like a lamp within an alabaster vase upon the pale wax of that cheek.

Her mother sat beside her—a noble, haughty-looking dame, of splendid figure and fine handsome face, and covered with diamonds that an emperor might have envied; but the daughter was slender, not to say thin, and her face, though faultless in point of feature, was devoid of ani-

mation, and possessed little power of captivating.

Of course the Lady Angelina had had hosts of suitors, but she had remained insensible until now.

Now, however, the star ascendant of Ridley triumphed over a heart cold and hard as adamant; and he found himself, not only elevated to the highest position in the political world, but the envy of the world of *ton*, through the reputation of having achieved this unequalled conquest.

Ambition—vanity—nay, that sort of gratitude which any man must feel for a heart bestowed under such circumstances, for the moment almost intoxicated him.

The Lady Angelina had been well educated; her manners were of exquisite polish, and she was not devoid of talents. He danced with her, he sat by her, he talked with her; her arm rested upon his as he led her to her mother's carriage: it was the most entrancing evening he had ever passed in his life.

He flung himself upon his bed wearied with excitement, and dreamed of splendours to come.

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It was a cold evening in the country, though

the chilliness was not such as to be felt in London; where the blaze of lights, the glow of fires, and the passage from one scene to another in well-closed carriages, render the variation of seasons, except in their extremes, imperceptible.

It had rained, a cold misty rain, and the air was raw and ungenial; the trees were lightly tinted with green, but the sun was hidden, and the sky was lowering. It was an evening upon which we love to shut out the lingering light, to draw the curtains an hour too soon, make a good fire, and sit down comfortably by its side.

Miriam could not bear the house. The rain had kept her in all day; but her father had been busy as usual, and she had been spared the effort, daily and hourly becoming more insupportable, of endeavouring to amuse him by her conversation, as in better, happier days, and to appear before him as usual.

The little cabin which she called her own, and in which she had been so contented and so happy, seemed now to suffocate her; the low ceiling to press upon her brain; and the narrow space between the walls afforded no relief as she paced it up and down, for she could not sit still. The rain kept pattering upon the window, and she walked the little cell with the dull,

irksome, restless uneasiness, of some denizen of the forest imprisoned in his cage.

Her handkerchief was in her hand—it was absolutely soaked, but her eyes were quite dry now; and from time to time she kept going to her little washing-stand, and wetting the towel and bathing the lids; and then she would walk to the window and look out, despairing and impatient, at the leaden sky, and wring her hands, and walk up and down that little chamber once more.

At last, with a timorous, anxious, half-guilty look, she opened her door and listened.

Her father seemed still busy in his study. She stepped back again, looked into her glass, drew her hair over her eyes and over her faded features; again passed the towel over her face, to obliterate the traces of her tears, looking round from time to time with a heart trembling with impatience, and in terror of she knew not what.

Alas! where was all her proud and courageous spirit fled?

She took down her bonnet and her cloak, and hurriedly put them on. The sun had set—there would be time yet to hurry to the post-office, and ask for the letters. It would be dusk before she got into the town—the post-office was in a back street—nobody would observe her.

They had not many correspondents you may suppose, this secluded pair, and they had not the luxury of a letter-carrier; the letters lay till they fetched them themselves. It was but within these last few months that delay had become intolerable, and that Miriam contrived, when she expected a letter from Ridley, to steal out of the garden by the back way, hurry to the town, and fetch it herself.

Alas! to how many deceptions and subterfuges, even from the first, had her deviation from rectitude at the persuasion of Ridley led her! The secrecy he had induced her to practise with respect to her father—how had it embittered every moment of her life!—how had it poisoned with the cruellest self-reproach those moments—even the happiest—devoted to her lover! She knew she had done wrong; all the delusions of passion, as urged by her lover or by her own deceiving heart, could not hide from her conscience the ingratitude of which this breach in her obedience and integrity rendered her guilty: but she hoped every day to be released from the promises Ridley had exacted, and at her father's knees confessing all she had done, to be raised to his arms and forgiven.

Alas! she little knew into what a depth of misery this deviation from duty had plunged her.

As yet to have practised deceit upon her father had been the most painful of her regrets ; but the increasing coldness of Ridley's letters, and the length of time which now elapsed between each, was what had occasioned the dreadful irritation and suffering in which we find her.

But this night there *must* be a letter.

At last, her fingers tingling, her cheeks dyed with blushes, she had written to him whom she considered as her husband, to confess that secret so dear to a loved and acknowledged wife — so dreadful — so agonising in circumstances such as hers. She had written to Ridley, and had insinuated, rather than told, the real circumstances in which she stood ; and conjuring him, as he valued her peace and honour, to allow her to reveal all that had passed to her father.

“ Only to my father, dear Ridley,—and under the seal of that strictest secrecy which, until permitted by you, I will never—never break. I am yours — yours alone. My whole heart and soul, and life, are yours, to direct as you think best for yourself. Content, nay blest, in your affection, the thought that you are prosperous and happy makes absence even from you endurable. Shame, disgrace, anything for your sake, so long as your interests require the secret between us to be kept, you know I will gladly, courageously,

endure. What is the world to me? I never knew it — never wanted it. I had but one affection on earth till I saw you, and that was for my father. Oh, Ridley! when I think what I have done — that I have betrayed his confidence, and disobeyed his injunctions . . . . But then you tell me there is a mightier obligation even than this . . . . — that love to the chosen of one's heart is a stronger tie. Alas! alas! I feel it true. You say that we do not choose our parents—that we have chosen each other. Alas! alas! Ridley — my own Ridley — why do I begin to repeat these things? Husband! — lover! — I acknowledge your power. I am here on earth only to be ruled by your will. Do with me — order me as is best — don't let my happiness — don't let any thought of me, interfere with your progress and your happiness. Is it for a little insignificant cloud to darken the sun in his course? But let me make reparation to my father. Ah, Ridley! — think — a father! — Ridley, dear Ridley — can you not already. . . . Ah, dear! — when I think — on my knees — Ridley, let me tell my father" . . .

Such had been her earnest pleadings.

She begged humbly, from the man she had elected as her master, this one indulgence in return for so many sacrifices. Trembling, shuddering, fluttering—at moments agitated with new

and exquisite feelings of joy and hope, at others bowed down with remorse and anxiety—thus had she written, and to-day the answer would arrive.

It began to rain, and the wind blew cold and whistled among the trees, as she hurried out of the little gate, and the blast rushed wildly past her as she crossed the common; and then, with her hood drawn over her head, she might be seen creeping up by the side of the wall, and with trembling fingers knocking at the postman's window,—

“Any letters for C. A., Post-office, Kettlewell?”

He sorted over the letters in his usual cool, indifferent way.

“No, I don't think there is.”

She was turning away, her heart dying within her.

“Stay, stay!—yes, yes, there's one.”

The white, thin, impatient, trembling hand, snatched at it through the window.

“Eightpence to pay.”

The other hand pushes in the ready prepared pence, and with a heart wildly beating with ecstacy, and her nerves restored at once to elasticity, the colour glowing in her cheeks, and her eyes wet with grateful tears, she hurries away.

There was yet light enough to read by when she got upon the common.



She could not wait till she got home. She sat down in a well-known secluded nook, upon a great mossy stone that had so often served them for a seat together. She pressed the letter over and over again to her lips; she prolonged the ecstasy of the moment for a few seconds, and then she broke open the seal and read.

## CHAPTER VI.

“’Twas a hard change, an evil time was come,  
We had no hope, and no relief could gain.”

WORDSWORTH.

*Ridley to Miriam.*

“I COME in late, and find your letter. The post is just going out, but I will not lose one. Are you mad? Tell your father!—what can you be thinking of? It would ruin us both—you, in the first place; for I vow to Heaven if you were capable—if I could think you for one instant capable of such folly, weakness, and treachery—come what come would of it, I would never see you more! You do not know the immensity of the embarrassment into which you would plunge me. For heaven’s sake, keep your secret more closely than ever! As to what you insinuate, I hope to heaven you are mistaken! but if the worst should be true, only have a little patience: I will look to it when necessary. He’s come for

the letters. Only time to repeat, that as you value my regard, or dread my deepest, unmitigable displeasure, you will not breathe even to the four walls of your own chamber a suspicion of what has passed between us.”—G. R.

He is in full dress and in high spirits just at this moment, stepping into his carriage for the Speaker’s dinner.

And she—the letter clenched in her palsied hands, indifferent to the rain which is streaming down from her bonnet and hair, and to the wind, which chills her limbs, but cannot add chill to a heart already cold as a stone—sits there, looking up and down in an intensity of misery, which only women are born to feel or men to inflict.

She sat there, wildly rocking herself to and fro, she knew not for how long; then suddenly she remembered that her absence might excite suspicion—that her father might miss her—that something might betray her—that Ridley would be very, very angry—that he would never forgive her.

She got up in a confused, hurried manner, and, drenched with rain, but with her eyes quite tearless, struggled on towards the house. The terror of offending Ridley mastered every other feeling. She gathered up strength and composure as she

reached the kitchen-door, and, telling Peggy she had been caught in a shower, was wet through, and must go to bed, contrived to get up stairs and lock her door.

She hurried off her things, that she might get into bed, and thus escape her father. She was but just in time. Peggy had already told him in what a state Miss Miriam had come in, and his step might be heard ascending the stair.

He knocked at the door, and in his usual kind, tender tone, said,—

“My child, may I come in? You are wet, they say. Such a night, my love, to go out!—and you must take care of yourself, Miriam;”—for he had opened the door as she pulled the bolt. “I have not thought you looking so well, my darling, lately. Let me feel your pulse—very much hurried, but, thank God, no fever! I will fetch you a little draught which will do you good. Dear child, don’t be so imprudent again, for your poor old father’s sake!”

It was well he was going away to fetch the medicine as he said this.

She turned her face to the wall, and groaned.

Then she hastily rubbed her handkerchief over her eyes; and when he came back, with his mild fatherly face so full of anxiety and love, and looked at her so tenderly, those large eyes of

hers for a moment were fixed upon his face, and then instantly withdrawn; but the expression was such, that, bending down over her, he said in a serious tone, —

“Something is the matter, Miriam—I am sure of it! Tell your poor father, child!—sure you have no secrets from *me*!”

“Oh, nothing—nothing at all is the matter! I was only thinking how kind you are—so very, very kind—and how little—how little——”

But there she stopped.

“How little what, love?—how little what, love?”

“How little I can do in return”—blushing at the evasion.

“Is that all—is that all you mean?”

He looked at her for one moment—a slight, indistinct doubt of her sincerity, that, for the first time in her life, she had concealed some part of her meaning, just flashed for a moment across his mind; but he was a stranger to jealousy or suspicion: he had felt it but for a moment, and even for that moment he blamed himself—it was wronging his Miriam.

“Foolish child!” he said, gently patting her cheek, “thou art hurried and nervous. Go to sleep—go to sleep, and never think but that thy duty and affection would richly reward a far

better father than ever it has been in my power to prove myself."

And he stooped down and kissed her cheek and went away, persuaded that her wet, hurried walk through the rain, had been too much for her. So he went down and made his tea, poor man! alone; and as the wind howled around the casement, and the rain, pattered sharp against the glass, and as he stirred up the little fire he had made, and boiled the kettle carefully to make some hot tea for Miriam, how lost and forlorn he felt without his beautiful child to chat to him, and cut his bread and butter, and talk over the adventures of the day.

Lately, it is true, she had done this in a somewhat different manner from what she had been used to do. There was a softness, almost a languor, in her expression and gestures, that was new; but the change had come on insensibly; and then, in these moods, she looked so like her mother, that he loved her almost better so; and then, at times, there was a fulness of content and happiness in her expression (this was when she had got an encouraging letter from Ridley), which persuaded him that nothing was really amiss, and that she was as happy in her seclusion with him as she had ever been.

So he would comfort himself with the assurance

that all was as it should be, and would go to his books and his calculations again—things which, unfortunately, had so completely absorbed him during the last many months, that he had found time and attention for little else.

These long calculations, as it is well known, occupy a very considerable time, which insensibly slips away in a species of abstraction that separates a man from the world around him almost as entirely as if he were physically absent from it. The meals with Miriam were his only recreation, and even at these he was often absorbed in his own thoughts; so that, to conceal the silence into which she often sank, and the variableness of her spirits, she found a task more within her power than otherwise would have been the case.

That became possible which would else have been impossible.

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Whilst her father had been in Miriam's room, as related above, the effort to conceal her feelings had in some degree diverted their force; but who, under the influence of a dreadful sorrow, has not experienced the horrible reaction after some temporary diversion of this sort?

She rolled upon her bed, her poor hands

clenched, her hair all falling in heavy locks dishevelled about her. The words of the cruel letter seemed burnt in upon her heart, and a painful sense of bodily agony was added to the anguish of her mind.

Then she turned, hid her face in her pillow, and longed for tears ; but her eyes were still dry as stones.

Then she again heard her father's step coming up the stairs—gathered up her hair, scuttled on her little nightcap, turned her face to the wall, and pretended to be asleep.

She heard him listen at the door, open it cautiously ; she felt that he was approaching the bed, and then that he was standing gazing at her. But she still feigned sleep ; she dared not look up. Then she heard him put the teacup he held softly down upon her little table, move the little table with much precaution close to her bed, and then with stealthy steps—in the smothered sounds of which so much love and carefulness might be read—go down stairs again.

And then she learned to know that there is a love that passeth show, and which all the vehemence of passion is powerless to rival—and to imagine the full value of a parent's heart ; and then she blessed him in her inmost soul, vowing to repair her one breach of confidence and duty



by the most devoted affection, and never to rest until she had obtained leave to confess her secret to her best and truest friend. Then nature stirred within her, and her heart melted to think that she too was destined to feel a parent's love—that a being would spring to light who would claim from her a parent's dearest care;—that the image of Ridley would be renewed—a second Ridley appear, to be cherished for the sake of his father and herself, and to be her glory and her pride, when the day should arrive that she should be acknowledged a wife.

And then came a bright vision of the future, and the cruelty of the present was excused or forgotten. “He had been hurried, no doubt, and his situation was a very perplexing one;” and she gazed upon a ring of rich gold-work, with a small cameo in the centre, which, upon a never-to-be-forgotten day, he had placed upon her finger, and she kissed it, and thought of past happy moments, and of happier still to come; and the sweet woman's confidence returned, and she fell asleep.

And in all this you will observe poor Miriam was entirely self-dependent. She suffered and was consoled, she erred and repented, as nature undirected, and a most generous and feeling disposition prompted; but she had not been taught,

and it was a habit utterly foreign to her mind, to rest upon a better strength—a higher sentiment—a more serious regard to the principles of right or wrong. She was under her own guidance, poor young thing! and a delusive guide her simple heart had proved.

Her father sat by his fire in his loneliness, self-dependent too. His calculations, his habits of abstracted thought, had served till now to preserve the health of his mind and the equilibrium of his feelings, and he was far—far from imagining, how much might be wanted besides. So gentle as was his temper, and so just his heart, he seemed to need less self-correction than most other men. He had never felt the force of the passions, the perilous strength of temptation, nor even the dark depths of an overwhelming grief. He had never experienced that hollowness and emptiness of the things seen, which drives man in his own despite to take refuge among the things unseen.

The solitary dulness of this evening was, after all, of far too quiet a character to awaken any thing like a feeling of these higher necessities, if I may so call them, within his breast.

But he found it impossible to take refuge in his usual employment. His mind was too much confused and absorbed, and the picture

of Miriam, and that look in her eye, which he could not understand, a something unintelligible about her deportment which he could not quite settle with himself, whether he saw or fancied he saw — prevented his thoughts composing, as when ruffled they usually did upon reflection. He sat there, stirring his little fire, and laying on fresh wood from time to time; and then he opened the casement, and looked out upon the blowing, blustering night, with not a star to be seen. And then he crept—crept—stealthily, up to his daughter's room, and opened the door cautiously, and looked in.

Her face was now turned towards him, and he saw, by the gentle heaving of the counterpane, that she was in a sweet sleep. Her dark eye-lashes lay upon her cheek, which was flushed with a colour more lovely than the dawn of day; and her rich bright hair had escaped from her little cap, and fell rolling round her face. And there was in that face an expression of heavenly calm, as when the clouds of sorrow have passed by. The father looked upon his treasure as only a father upon a precious daughter looks, and the blessings of his loving heart rained down upon her, and she seemed to smile in her sleep as if the precious influence had penetrated.

Then he stole away, and went to his little pallet, and laid himself down and felt comforted.

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They met at breakfast the next morning.

Miriam had read her letter over again upon first opening her eyes, and the impression it made upon her, thus coolly considered, was more painful even than the first shock—it had completely dispelled the fond visions with which she had composed herself to rest the night before. The coldness, the cruelty—the egotism and selfishness displayed in every line, could not entirely be overlooked, even by her blind affection. She thought Ridley very unkind to write in so harsh a manner to her, who had sacrificed so much for him, and tried to persuade herself that it was through the insensibility natural to his sex, and not through peculiar unkindness or coldheartedness upon his part, that there was not one word of comfort or tenderness to be found in the whole letter—not one cheering syllable of encouragement for her, under her trying circumstances. She tried to recollect what she had read, or might have heard, of men appearing hard towards women, because utterly incapable of understanding

the tenderness and sensibility of their feelings; but then her romances would come into her head, and the exquisite sensibility there painted would rise to her recollection in painful contrast. And then she thought of her fault—her great—her heavy fault, and cast a wild despairing sort of look around upon her prospects.

What was she to expect?—what was she to do?

That secret, which Ridley seemed so unwilling to believe, was indeed a truth, at the conviction of which every vein tingled. Now her face was dyed with crimson, from a mingled feeling of confusion, hope, and sweetness; then terror, and shame, and a dreary anticipation of horror, succeeded; the colour faded upon her cheek, and she became deadly pale.

In this contention of different feelings she heard her father calling upon her to come to breakfast, and after again endeavouring to steady her trembling nerves with all the effort she was capable of, again consulting the glass to see whether she had obliterated the trace of her tears, she crept down the little staircase, and entered the room.

The morning was cold, and, as she opened the door, the first thing she saw was her father upon his knees, fanning up the fire, and endeavouring to make obstinate, damp wood burn, and an ob-

stinate kettle boil. He turned round and rose up as she came in exclaiming,—

“Oh, sir! let *me* do that. That is my business—to wait upon you.”

“Yes, my darling, it has been thy business,” coming up to her, laying his white, thin hand upon her head, and stroking fondly down the beautiful auburn hair; “but something is the matter with my Miriam. Nay, child, as she turned away her head, but made no answer, for her heart was too full for her to venture to speak, “something is the matter! But sit down now by the fire, for your poor little hands are as cold as stones. And now the kettle boils—I shall have a hot cup of coffee ready for you in a moment, and then, my love, we will talk a little together, as friends should, Miriam,—as the best and most faithful friends, a trusting father and a pious daughter should, my child. Nay—nay, sit down!”

And he gently forced her to sit down in his own peculiar arm-chair, which he had placed ready for her by the fire, and busied himself preparing the coffee for her.

How happy had they been in their simple life till lately!—he sitting in that chair, with his book upon the desk by his side, watching her simple operations, as light of heart, as light of

foot, she busied herself in getting his breakfast for him. What had fallen between them?—what dark and blighting shadow, reversing their whole position, and changing every feeling of cheerful affection into bitterness and anxiety? Oh! how her lip trembled when she tried to speak, and how her hand shook as she lifted her cup to her lips!

He sat down upon her own little chair, and affected to be busy with his own breakfast, but now and then he cast an uneasy glance at her; and every time he looked the conviction strengthened, that something really was the matter—that mere fatigue and a little alteration in her health would not account for the internal agitation which she vainly attempted to conceal.

An apprehension that all was not right—that there was a secret—that there was a concealment, began to dawn upon his mind—and what secret could a young girl of her age have but one? She felt that her father's kind, anxious eye was fixed upon her, with a deeper scrutiny than she had ever known in it before, and dreading lest he should demand an explanation, which she dared not give, so soon as she had finished her cup of coffee she rose up, as if in haste, and seemed about to hurry out of the room; but he laid

his hand upon her arm, and gently pressed her into her chair again.

“Don’t go away just now, Miriam,” he said, —“spare your father a quarter of an hour. It has lately ——”

“I only wanted to fetch something—my work—speak to Peggy,” said she, hesitating and colouring, but sitting down again, for, indeed, she could not help it.

He kept holding her arm, which fixed her, as it were, in her place; and while she, with her eyes cast down, her heart evidently beating fast, and the colours changing rapidly in her cheek, sat there before him, he perused her face some time in silence, with a sad, anxious expression, which grew more sad and more anxious every moment, till loosing her arm, and falling a little back, but with his eyes still fixed—oh! so mournfully, tenderly, and compassionately upon her, he said,—

“There is a secret hid from thy father, but thou must tell me all, my child.”

She looked up with a hasty, startled glance, then dropped her eyes again, and was silent; a sigh, almost a sob, seemed struggling to get vent, but was repressed with determination.

“Miriam,” said he, in a tone of gravity and



authority, which she had never heard him assume before, “there *is* a secret—I am satisfied of it—you *must* tell it me at once.”

Still silent, but her hand kept twitching with slight convulsions as it lay upon her lap.

He said no more at present, but sat watching her with increasing and most painful anxiety.

She, meantime, sat there, endeavouring to recall to recollection all those arguments which Ridley had used to confound her sense of duty, darken her conscience, and harden her heart, in the course of deception to which he had persuaded her. The words of his letter,—“If I could even *think* you capable of such folly, baseness, and treachery, come what would of it, I would discard you from my heart, and never see you more,” were still ringing in her memory; and with that rapid change of aspect under which the same sentiment will often appear to a mind unsteadied by principle and reflection, the words, thus separated from the rest of that cruel letter, seemed to possess a force altogether new, and she began to believe that it would be, as he said, folly, baseness, and the worst of treachery, to betray his secret to her father.

Love ill-placed and ill-regulated, love indulged and unconfessed, thus vitiates the best and ten-

derest feelings, and corrupts the most truthful and ingenuous characters.

The more her father pressed her, and still more as his tones of tenderness began to be exchanged for those of authority, the more her heart seemed to close and harden.

As he watched her, a new expression seemed to rise upon that countenance, so true a reflex of every impression. Gradually the varied colours died away into a kind of stony, ashy paleness, and her eye, as she lifted it up, was cold and hardened.

She met an eye, on his part, as changed as her own. The exceeding tenderness had yielded to sorrow, but to a sorrow blended with an almost stern determination, as he said,—

“Miriam, that I have been negligent, abstracted, too confiding, perhaps, I own. You have had no mother, poor child;” but at that his eye softened again, and he said, with a tone almost of entreaty, “tell me your secret, for I must, nay, I *will* know it!”

Still silent, and her head turned away, she fixed her eyes upon the fire.

He thought he saw something dogged and obstinate in her look, which began to arouse the *man* within him. There is something implanted

in the very nature of the father which rises against the rebellion of the child.

“Miriam,” he said, “this is the fourth time I have spoken, and yet have had no answer. I *insist* upon an end being put to this extraordinary silence. Miriam, there is a secret between you and me—I command you to tell it me!”

And as he spoke, he rose with an air of dignity and authority from his chair, and stood before her as some calm and immovable judge, prepared to receive the confession of a criminal.

But she did not speak; she cast up an eye in which a strange mixture of expressions might be read; there was surprise—the surprise of a child first found fault with,—there was fear, awe, but there was unflinching determination.

The more of manly resolution there appeared in her father’s behaviour, the more she felt as if beginning to understand the reasons for Ridley’s injunctions that she should keep his secret from him; and the more she began to fear that some rash step upon Mr. Feversham’s part might perplex and embarrass *him* under circumstances about which he had talked so much. Vaguely, indeed, so that she had no distinct idea of the mischief she might do him—but this very obscurity seemed to magnify the danger in her eyes. The more energy her father displayed, the more

she felt her resolution to obey her lover's injunctions to the letter strengthen.

He said no more as yet, but kept eyeing her, as if waiting a reply, with that air of determination which extorts an answer.

At last it came, in a low but unhesitating voice,—

“ I told you I was not very well—that is *all*.”

“ Miriam, don't turn your head away—look up into your father's face. Child, I have brought you up in a sacred regard for truth—it is the first obligation between man and man. I speak not of father and child——” his voice faltered at that last sentence;—he stopped a few minutes to recover his self command, then—“ Look up, Miriam, your eyes were once the mirror of sincerity and honour . . . but I read only defiance in them now,” he added, in a broken voice, as he looked at her and turned away.

“ No, no,” said she, in a low hoarse voice, which she endeavoured in vain to make like her usual one—“ don't—don't—not defiance—no, no——”

“ What is it, then?” coming up to her again. “ What is it, then, my Miriam?” in the kindest tone, softened by the change which had come over her—for she had dropped upon her knees, had laid hold of his hand, and had pressed her lips to

it—"My darling, I was impatient with you—my pretty one, tell me——"

"Nothing, nothing," she muttered.

He drew his hand away from her again disappointed, and walking to the window stood looking into his garden.

She got up and was again endeavouring to glide out of the room, but he turned round when he heard her move,—

"Stay where you are for the present," he said.

He stood at the window reflecting; and the more he reflected the more his perplexity increased. His suspicions would have rested upon Ridley, but it was now nearly five months since Ridley's departure. Nothing had occurred at the time he had quitted Mr. Abel's to awaken the least suspicion that Miriam's affections had been disturbed. She had evidently liked Ridley's company at first, but the precaution which her father had taken, and the tranquillity with which she had endured the separation he had commanded, had set his mind quite at rest upon the subject; to which, indeed, nothing had led him to advert again. He had been obliged to take a little journey alone to visit a friend in distress, and since his return had been particularly engaged with some of his scientific inquiries. When they met she had seemed cheerful, and as usual. The

poor father's most extravagant suspicions never approached the truth in the slightest degree. The idea of being betrayed by his daughter—of a clandestine intercourse carried on—far, far less, of the extent, the horrible extent, to which the treachery of Ridley had been carried, never once crossed his remotest thought. That she had given her heart away, and concealed it from him, perhaps, but to whom he could not guess,—that was the extent of the secret he imagined withheld; and as he stood reflecting there he began to say to himself that he was but a father after all, and that it was natural that a young girl should dislike to entrust such secrets to him, a man—that though he had tried to be father and mother in one to her, and had done all he could by tenderness and indulgence to make up for the loss of her mother, still his best efforts must produce but an imperfect result—that there were histories of the young life that only could naturally be disclosed to a mother; and then his heart smote him, poor man—he thought he had been harsh and unkind, and had naturally aroused by that harshness the spirit of rebellion which had hurt him so much.

He had lost his temper—how cruel to that poor motherless child!

His heart smote him. He stood yet a little

while at the window to compose himself, and then he came and sat down again upon the little chair, and said with an air of angelic affection and gentleness,—

“ My poor motherless Miriam, your father was too harsh with you—if you don’t like to tell him, don’t. Only be happy, child. I did not intend to be harsh with you—forgive me, Miriam.”

But with that she sank down at his feet, buried her head upon his knees, and burst into an agony of tears.

He stroked her head, and tenderly soothed her—he read, and so far rightly, in this little scene all a good child’s contrition for a fault. He felt reassured by the little explanation he had made to himself, simple enough as it was; in his anxiety to soothe her and make her stop crying, he almost forgot those latent suspicions which had given rise to the conversation, whilst with his usual extreme kindness and gentleness he strove to reassure her and comfort her.

He little knew that every kind word he said was planting, to use the commonplace phrase, daggers in her bosom—but it seemed to her feelings literally so.

She, however, kept her face hidden between her hands till she found it possible to recover, in

some degree, her accustomed composure, and then fondly kissing her father's hands, she rose from her knees, pressed another most affectionate kiss upon his forehead, and quite subdued in spirit, resolved to write immediately to Ridley, and insist upon being permitted to take her father into their confidence. She rose up, left the room, and went straight to her own little parlour in search of her writing-desk.

He walked away to his study, and took up his paper of calculations; but again he found it impossible to abstract his mind and divert his uneasiness by attention to them. He glanced over the long array of figures, but they seemed to dance before his eyes—his head seemed to have lost the faculty of abstraction.

He sighed and laid the papers down again; and then taking his old rusty hat from off the nail upon which it hung, pressed it firmly over his brows, and without calling his daughter, as was his invariable custom, to join him in his walk, he too in his turn hurried away through the garden. He looked neither to the right hand nor to the left at all his pretty shrubs and flowers, now fast covering with sheets of blossom, but, opening the little gate, hastened across the open common, as if in dread of meeting any one, and, entering a narrow path, was soon lost amid the



most desolate and savage tracts of the mountain.

Here he passed the whole of that long April day, gloomily and sorrowfully.

They had been as one. The affection and sweet confidence they had enjoyed had been unbroken until now. How tenderly he had cherished and tended this precious treasure ever since the day when, a poor motherless infant, she was placed moaning in his arms!

He thought of the many sleepless nights he had passed in a sort of nervous anxiety; going every now and then to the little nursery door to listen whether his baby was quiet and asleep—of those eyes of dawning intelligence that had brightened into such a lovely light when he approached—of the little chubby hands that had patted his cheek.

He thought of the dear and clever little girl to whose amusement and education he had devoted so much of his time—stolen from those pursuits to him so dear, but bestowed upon that which was dearer still—of their walks hand in hand—of their lessons over the winter fire—of his busy and clever little housewife making his tea, so proud and happy to be of use to *him*—and, last of all, of the full fruition of this fair promise in his darling, darling, beautiful, blooming daughter

—of his pride, his glory in her—and of the love which had repaid all the long and silent devotion of his soul.

And then the good and generous parent began to say to himself that this could not last—that such joys were not intended to last—that the cry of universal nature proclaimed the truth, and that the undivided affection, to him so precious, it was selfish in him even to *wish* to retain—that the strong and individual tie that knit them so closely together must now be broken.

That he might, must retain, all the intensity of his father's love; but that he must not expect—it was not possible so to be—that the child should return it with the whole of hers; and that she, in her turn, was asking for a happiness intenser still than that they had enjoyed together.

The more he reflected upon what he had observed, the more he felt certain that some attachment was the cause of the change he had lamented, and he resolved to endeavour to secure her happiness at all events.

To ensure this, the first step was to learn her secret; and then if it were in his power, at any sacrifice, to make her happy, it should be done.

He cast one glance backward at all the happiness he had enjoyed in her affections; one other forward to that dreary old age, upon the

confines of which he felt himself already standing.

One vague, uncertain glance throughout this universe, in which he felt himself so utterly alone—one vague aspiration towards something changeless and sublime, in whose communion was neither disappointment nor decay.

It was as a vague and beautifully transient gleam which just beamed upon his prospects, but the clouds gathered again over it, and it was gone.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Oh, happy garden! whose seclusion deep  
Hath been so friendly to industrious hours;  
And to soft slumbers that did gently steep  
Our spirits, carrying with them dreams of flowers.”

WORDSWORTH.

MIRIAM sat in her little chamber writing to her lover. The window was open, and the clouds had rolled away; the sun was shining, and the blossoms were all out; the garden was a sheet of flowers and leaves. Birds were peering about among the apple and pear blossoms, and calling, and singing, and chattering to one another; and a couple of squirrels in an old cherry-tree gambolled there, busy biting off the blossoms and strewing them upon the ground.

The peace of nature gave serenity and courage to her heart—fresh confidence revived in her lover’s truth and affection, as thus she wrote:—

*Miriam to Ridley.*

“ My Ridley,—I was very unjust, I fear—I have become wayward and unjust—I am so unhappy sometimes—this long, long, wearisome, absence! Tell me a little in your next that *you*, too, feel it wearisome at times, when you are tired of success and the incense of praise, and long for quiet, and—and—may I hope it, for your poor Miriam? It is such a heavenly day to day, and last evening it was so rainy and cold, and I am like the little woman in our weather-teller: I answer, I believe, to the weather. Last night—oh, how miserable I was! I thought your letter *so* cold—so unkind, dare I say—but I am sure you wrote it in a hurry, and quite in a fright, too, I see, lest I should betray you—which, indeed—indeed, Ridley, I never, never, will till you give me leave. I remember what passed upon that evening when those words were spoken which made me yours for ever; and did I not, what have I in the world dearer than you, Ridley? But you should not write me such letters, indeed you should not. I opened it in such an ecstasy of joy—and then I read it—and oh, Ridley! how I sat and cried after I had read it. I felt as if my heart was all but broken.

Don't chide me—but you must not write me such letters again, indeed you must not. A word from you, is it not enough? More than enough?—for am I not devoted life and soul to you? and your least wishes, are they not to me as the most sacred of commands?

“But it rained very hard last night; and I was so silly, I kept crying so, I could not go home. Indeed, I never thought of or felt the rain; and it was unlucky, for my father, when I came in so wet, was anxious and came to my room, and I was so quite, quite done for, Ridley,—really I could not help it—he found out I was unhappy. I can hide my happiness, but this great, great unhappiness it is very difficult. I did my best—indeed I did—but he is such a father—has been such a father. We used to be like one heart; never child and father lived for each other as we did, till there came a spoiler—a too dangerous spoiler, and stole poor Miriam's heart from her father. He would forgive me that, too, I could not help it; but this deceit!—

“Ridley, we had such a conversation after breakfast. He questioned me straitly; he was grave and serious. I thought of you, and was firm as iron—iron-hearted, Ridley; think of that—and to such a father! But I will be so no more. I fell at his feet and begged his pardon

for keeping a secret from him, not aloud, but to myself; and then I vowed I would put an end to this hateful deception. He will forgive me, I am sure he will, and perhaps love—perhaps—perhaps be able to esteem me again. He will be indulgent to the faults of a tenderness like mine; but whatever the consequences to me—and, oh, how I tremble at the idea of meeting his eye—his *changed* eye, Ridley! Confess all to him I will.

“I therefore beg of you to give me leave to do it. I am sure my father will never betray you; and in short—for this letter runs on—I seem hurried beyond myself. I *can* and *will* deceive my father no longer; and I am sure, if you are the Ridley I so tenderly loved—the Ridley I honoured as much as I adored, you will relent, you will recollect that my duties must be considered in their turn. And, oh, how I write! I seem to be almost dictating—preaching you would call it. You will hate me if I do. Don’t hate me altogether, husband! lover! idol! for the sake of a future which it stirs my inmost heart to think of.

“It is *true*.”

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Ridley received this letter as he was preparing to mount his horse and join a party to ride in the Park, and walk, as was the fashion at that time, in Kensington Gardens, with the Lady Angelina.

He was not alone urged by ambition and the love of money, yet, though not avaricious, money was precious to him as a *power*; but in addition to these motives he was beginning to be really attracted, to a considerable degree, by the Lady Angelina.

Love is the child of the imagination, perhaps quite as much as of the heart; perhaps I might say, the offspring of pride quite as often as of tenderness. People of more fancy than feeling are captivated by the idea of superiority in rank and station; they love to place their affections high. This is more especially the case with women; nay, the sentiment had given strength even to Miriam's attachment to Ridley, pure and tender as it was; and it now exercised an influence over him, fatal to all her happiness. When men are led by this feeling, I think it has a more pernicious effect upon them than it has upon women, whose ambition in love is usually of a noble and lofty character: but be that as it may, certain it is, that as Ridley's heart—rather say, his thoughts—became oc-



cupied with his new attachment, the harder and the colder he grew in every other respect.

He certainly was gratified in the extreme by the Lady Angelina's attachment, which, without doubt, was flattering to the highest degree. He was proud of the conquest of one esteemed invincible, and he chose to dignify his feelings by dwelling upon the generous disinterestedness of that heart, which had thus singled him out among admirers wealthier and of far higher station in society than himself.

And yet the Lady Angelina was incapable of any very high or generous sentiment. She was only influenced partly by caprice, and partly by a spirit of contradiction. She was quite incapable of that self-sacrifice which is true generosity; and a woman who yields to a whim of this nature, is not one whit the less selfish because she condescends somewhat in her affections. The object of her prepossession, however, can scarcely help considering it in this high light; and Ridley, though as ready to cast ridicule upon these sort of girlish preferences in the case of others as any man about town, chose, as I said, to consider the prepossession of the Lady Angelina in his favour as the highest proof of disinterestedness and excellence.

He chose, too, in his wickedness and his stony-

heartedness, to contrast it with the humble, devoted love of the poor girl he had forsaken, and he dared to blaspheme against a noble heart so far, as to accuse her of selfishness in aspiring so high in her affections, as to have attempted to have entangled him in a marriage so derogatory to his fortunes. He dared to be false to himself, to say to himself that which he knew to be most wickedly untrue, and to accuse poor Miriam of sordid ambition, and a want of pure generosity in her affection, because he had not been able to teach her to despise those laws which the woman's instinct, in spite of all her vague ideas upon the subject, forbade her to hold cheap.

Her ideas, nevertheless, as I have said, were very confused upon this, as upon many other subjects, then discussed with a license which in our happier times it is difficult to understand; and he had easily persuaded her that the form of the ceremony binding upon the other side of the border must be equally binding upon this. He had talked a good deal of the usual jargon about Virtue being an affair of country, of latitude; of one ceremony, where, after all, the whole thing was a mere matter of ceremony, being as good as another; and she forgot, what he took care not to point out, that it is not how we ourselves regard the form employed, but how the society

around us regards it, which renders any ceremony irrevocably binding, and therefore sacred, and therefore a marriage.

At the time this apology for a marriage ceremony had passed between them, he was very considerably in love, and I believe, to do him justice—a poorextenuation enough—contemplated at some time or other adding all those legal sanctions to the union which he was perfectly well aware were wanting, and without which all that had passed was mere idle breath; but before long such intentions gradually died away, as generous or just intentions, not immediately carried into effect, are apt to do with all; and he had not been in London a month, separated from her, and exposed to all the diversion of the thoughts and affections incident to the great world, before he ceased to think of this reparation as due. He was too well practised in vice, his heart too much hardened by dissipation, to think much of the *one* victim more thus added to his list; he flattered himself that Miriam would keep her own secret for her own sake, and all the consequences of her imprudence and his treachery end here.

He was a good deal annoyed when he got her letter announcing the impossibility of ultimate concealment, but he made up his mind that all

that was now due was to be very liberal as far as expense was concerned, and he hoped much from her own high-wrought feelings, and the vague principles of her father, trusting, as men do, that, some way or other, the thing would be hushed up. They were a long way off; he would never visit that part of the world again; and, after all, her fears and fancies might have deceived her. One thing, however, was certain, it was of the utmost consequence that the secret should in no ways get wind before his marriage with Lady Angelina was concluded. The worst that could then happen would be a domestic storm; angry and jealous tears, kissed and flattered away; a handsome provision made for his victims, and so on.

In this humour he had written his first hasty letter, now he opened Miriam's second.

He saw that she had still not the slightest idea of the deception put upon her, and that she claimed all the privileges, and felt all the security, of a wife. She had deceived her father, that was all. Little did she imagine how she had been herself deceived.

He read the artless letter, and his heart smote him; and as a sudden vision, the picture of Miriam in all her loveliness, as he had seen her first, in the bloom of her almost childish beauty,

with that eye of generous energy, that light elastic step, that something so peculiarly attractive, as he had once thought it, passed before him, contrasting with the cold, languid, fine lady, who was, or ought to be, mistress at present of his heart. For a moment—it was but for one brief moment—the poet, the romancer, the man of strong feeling, was too potent for the man of the world: it was but for a moment.

He laid the letter aside;—his horses are waiting at the door;—he went out and shut the door;—then he went back again and read the letter once more, and went and locked it up in his scrutoire; and then he mounted his horse and rode slowly into the Park.

The Lady Angelina was lolling negligently back in her open carriage, dressed in a profusion of soft white lace, with which her bonnet, her cloak, were covered, and decked with pale pink ribands, which set off the delicacy of her complexion—like the colour of an half-opened china-rose—to the greatest advantage. She lay back with her beautiful eyes half closed in a soft, sleepy, indolent manner, as if not one of all those gay cavaliers she passed were worthy to attract a moment's attention, till Ridley appeared, and then those sleepy lids were raised with one glance of bright intelligence; and the

sweetest smile in the world, as he thought, welcomed him. The vision of the wild, dark, beautiful girl of the mountains faded away.

How much he and the fair creature to whom he was now paying his addresses in all due form found to say; how charming he thought her, and how much flattered — nay, intoxicated with gratified self-love — he returned home, it is needless to dwell upon. By that time poor Miriam had again become only a vexatious obstruction in his path, and perplexity and mortification (those fatal foes to love), had taken possession of his mind when he thought of her.

But he had not time to think much of her, and this earnest, this imploring letter, lay unanswered for that day.

And the next day, and the next.

Not forgotten — he could not entirely drive the subject from his mind, but postponed it as a thing too disagreeable to give his attention to.

Every evening Miriam stole forth across the common, as soon as it was dark, and down the little street to the post-office; each evening to return to her little room with a heart chilled by disappointment, to sit there and cry.

Every hour her situation became more and more insupportable. Her father, it is true, ceased to question her further, but his anxious, and as

she thought, reproachful eyes, followed her about till she could scarcely bear them.

But no letter came.

She wrote again.

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*Miriam to Ridley.*

“ Indeed, Ridley, your silence is killing me — you have no idea — alas! how should you? — of all I suffer. My father seems wounded deeply by my want of confidence — and who knows but the most painful, nay, injurious, suspicions may be rising in his mind; suspicions it would kill me to deserve. One line, to tell me I may console my poor solitary heart by confessing all to my best and oldest friend. Dear Ridley, allow me to do this — or, indeed — indeed — in spite of myself, I must end this cruel state of secrecy and deception.”

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The answer to this letter was written off in an instant.

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*Ridley to Miriam.*

“For heaven’s sake keep quiet — don’t breathe a word of what has passed between us I charge you, if you have the slightest value for me left — I could not, and would not, forgive you. Only have patience. I little thought you were of such a strange, selfish, impatient nature — would to Heaven I had never known you!”

He had made his proposals in due form just a quarter of an hour before poor Miriam’s letter came.

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“Miriam,” said the father, after a long, long silence had been between them, broken only by his heavy sighs—it was in the twilight that he spoke thus; they were sitting after their tea was over; the casement was open, and the soft night air, now filled with the sweet scent of spring-flowers from their little garden, blew softly into the room: but they, neither of them, seemed to enjoy it. The stars stole out, one by one, twinkling dimly in the gray light, and the reed-sparrow sang in a lilac-bush hard by; but neither of them gazed at the fair stars as they stole forth,



or listened to the sweet notes of the little warbler: each seemed absorbed in their own thoughts; she leaning partly out of the window, but evidently noticing nothing; and he, thrown back in his arm-chair, his eyes fixed upon her, and evidently insensible and indifferent to all other objects.

They had used to love to sit so in their days of happiness; but lately he had called for candles as soon as the twilight set in, and had gone into his own room to distract his painful feelings by occupation; leaving her usually employed at her needle, drawing thread after thread languidly through.

But when he was gone, and she heard the door of his little study shut after him, she would open the window, rest her face upon the palm of her hands, and sit there in a sort of stupid despondency for hours, till the servant would come in to shut up, and it was time to go to bed.

Then she would knock at her father's door, and say, "Good night!" Sometimes he would rise, open it, and give her a kiss upon the forehead; sometimes he would only speak in answer.

But this night he did not call for candles, but stayed in the room; and she, without her work, and in a sort of reckless disdain of further concealment, had sat there, leaning out of the window, and the tears trickling down between her fingers.

He had sighed heavily several times; and every heavy sigh had gone to her heart; at last he broke silence—

“Miriam,” he said, “my dear child, I can bear this no longer; I have been hurt at you, Miriam. In the bitterness of my disappointment about you, I had made a resolution that my patience should at least equal your reserve. I would not *force* your confidence—but you are crying, child, my dear girl: your tears are terrible things to me; will you never trust your poor father, child?”

“Yes,” said she, turning round as if she had taken a sudden resolution, “I will; and he will forgive me all I have done.—I am married, sir.”

“Married!—good heavens!—what can she be meaning?” cried he, rising in great agitation, and coming up to her; “married, child! what are you saying?”

She turned herself from the window, rose up, threw herself upon his breast, and whispered,—

“Forgive me, dear, dear papa.”

“Forgive you, my child!” said he, kissing her forehead tenderly; “forgive you—I don’t know why I should not forgive you. Indeed, I am so astounded at what you tell me, my own love, that I know not what I say. Married!—

you—Miriam!—child!—when?—how?—who?—when?—and why this concealment from me?”

“Can you not guess who?” said she, and a smile of mingled satisfaction and pride gave for an instant the old brightness to her countenance; “there could be but *one*.”

“Nay,” said he, anxiously, “I hope not; and yet, who else indeed?—Oh!” he cried, suddenly clasping his hands over his face, and falling back upon his chair; “God forbid it should be him—not Ridley, child—and yet who else—who else?”

“Not Ridley! And why not Ridley, papa? Did you not admire him so greatly? Did you not think him the cleverest person you ever saw? Why not Ridley, dear father?”

“Married to *him*! Why, he is a man of rank and fortune far above our sphere, child.”

“Yes,” said she, colouring with pleasure; “I know that very well.”

“And he is not a man—believe me, child—he has excellent gifts—but he is not a man to forget the value of such things, Miriam.”

“No,” said she, “I believe not—but he has forgotten them for his Miriam.”

“And why, if so,” said the father, now taking her hand and sitting down in his chair, as she

stood before him; "why, my daughter, was I to be left out of this confidence?"

"Oh, I don't know! Indeed, I was very wrong, I know I was; it has cost me—oh, such pain! But he told me he was sure your ideas were too enlarged to adopt the prejudices of ordinary mankind, and that you would understand and appreciate . . . Oh, dear!" said she, passing her other hand over her forehead, "I can't remember—I don't know what he said exactly. But he told me it was of the utmost importance to him that the profoundest secrecy should be maintained, even from you, because you might not consent, or allow of a marriage of that sort; and that it would place you in an awkward position with respect to *his* friends, if you knew it; and—and—he called me so generous and confiding, to make him happy at the sacrifice of so many of my dearest *prejudices*, he called them—he might have said feelings; for, oh papa! papa! what bitter, bitter feelings I have had in thinking I was deceiving you!"

"And how long has this deception been maintained? How many months have my child and her father been as strangers?—And then," he said, looking very pale and anxious, "when and how did this marriage take place?"

“Do you remember,” she said, “your going into the Highlands last November, when poor Mr. Frost’s only daughter died? You were very sorry for him. And you would not take me with you, the travelling was so bad. You asked me whether I thought I could bear it, and I said I could not.”

“I remember it all very well,” he said, quietly.  
“Yes, I suppose that was the first”——

“Deception?” asked she, colouring, and in a low voice; “no, not the first.”

“I had forbidden him the house. I believed you never met again . . . And she was deceiving me all this time!”

He strove to suppress his groans.

“But, papa, papa!” said she, “it’s all over now. I did not think it would vex you so much when it all came out. One thinks it so natural to hide *some* feelings; and he persuaded me so. You know it’s what Julie did; but dear, dear papa! if I had known it would have vexed you so, I would not have done it for all the world. He said you’d forgive me readily enough when you *did* know. And so, indeed, indeed, I thought you would.”

“I do forgive you! I do forgive you!” said he, hastily; “say no more about it, say no more about it.”

He could not bear, so dear was her happiness to him, that she should be even aware of the cruel wound she had inflicted. She looked so dismayed and unhappy at the expression of anguish in his face, that he tried, poor father! to cheer up, and to hide his sufferings; and, endeavouring to assume a cheerful tone of voice, he said, "Well, then, take your low stool, and sit down by me, and let me hear this romantic story from beginning to end."

She sat down as he bade her, and laid her hand upon his knee, and turned her head away, blushed, and smiled, and hesitated. She forgot, for the moment, Ridley's silence and unkindness—she was lost in the recollection of those hours of devoted passion which had been as heaven to her.

She was recalling all his vows, and oaths, and promises, and those eyes so full of meaning which had spoken such volumes to her heart.

She tried to speak, but for some little time she could not.

He understood her confusion, and, stroking her head very kindly, said,—

"Don't, then; only tell me how and when you were married, for that, my dear Miriam," he added, gravely, "it concerns me, in all its details, to know."

“ It was one evening——” she began.

“ An evening !”

“ In that quiet glen, behind the Red-Cross Hill that——”

“ There is no church in *that* neighbourhood,” cried her father.

“ No,” she said ; “ we should have been discovered if we had gone to a church, we are both so well known about here : but that did not surely signify ?”

“ Go on,” he faltered ; “ who married you ?”

“ I don’t know : I never thought to ask him.”

The father’s cheek was by this time becoming deadly pale, and his breath seemed failing him, as he stammered,—

“ And—was—this—all ? Did the man give you no paper—no certificate ?”

“ I don’t know what a certificate means : he did not give me any paper. It’s what they do in Scotland, Ridley told me ; and surely, he said, one marriage was as good as another. What could a few miles more or less of mountain have to do with an affair of this kind ? He knew I despised ceremonies and forms. Had you not, dear father, ever taught me to despise them ?”

The father spoke not.

She turned round and looked in his face.

His eyes were fixed, his jaw fallen: he sat there upright in his chair, but as if turned to stone.

She started up and shrieked aloud,—

“ Papa—papa! don’t look so! What’s the matter? What’s the matter?”

He made a slow motion with his head, and gasped as if he were trying to speak.

She ran and fetched some water.

“ Dear papa!” the tears now running down her cheeks; “ what’s the matter with you? You seemed quite well just a moment ago. Do speak to me, for pity’s sake.”

His features now seemed slowly to relax from their tension, and the jaw remained no longer fixed; but he articulated with great difficulty, as he said,—

“ Tell them to come and fetch me to my bed.”

She ran for Peggy, who came hurrying in, and was dreadfully terrified when she saw the state her master was in.

“ He’s got a stroke of palsy, sure as I’m alive; bless you, how are we to get him to bed? Run, Miss Miriam, child, for your life, across the common, and beg farmer Jenkins, for the love of heaven, to come and help us; and Jack or Tom to ride for life and fetch the doctor.”



Stunned and confounded by what had passed, utterly unsuspecting of the shock he had sustained, she started from where she had been standing, looked at him in silent dismay, and rushing out, ran across the common to the good farmer's, whom she found just going to bed. He was evidently exceedingly alarmed and concerned at the hurried account she gave of her father's seizure; and despatching his eldest son to town in search of medical assistance, he hurried, with Miriam, back to the cottage. They found Mr. Feversham already recovering from the attack, though his power of speech was yet but imperfectly restored. As they prepared to move him upstairs, his daughter flew to support his head, and, bending tenderly over him, looked into his face with her loving, anxious eyes, as if endeavouring to discover the cause of his illness.

Such a look met hers!

To her it was quite inexplicable, in its profound expression of compassion and despair.

She felt sure that nothing which could have passed between them, not even her confession of the deception she had practised, which seemed to have wounded him so deeply, could have occasioned this. Not the slightest idea of the real cause crossed her mind, as, turning away his eyes, he again uttered a low groan.

They laid him upon his bed, without his speaking; and when there, he just asked them to draw the curtains and leave him to himself. He wished to be alone.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?”

*Lear.*

THE miserable father never once closed his eyes that night. He lay stretched almost helpless upon his bed; for, though not actually deprived of motion, the shock he had sustained had acted fearfully upon his delicate nervous system, and had produced that sudden depression of strength which incapacitated him from all exertion, at the very moment when he felt in need of all his energy and courage. To rush forward to assert his daughter's claims, and, if possible, rescue her from disgrace and desertion, was the first impulse of his mind. He lay there in a hurried confusion of distracting thoughts, which it was impossible for him to compose into anything like reflection: it

was as if a thick darkness had come over his soul, and all the cheerful harmony of thought and feeling was lost in one dreadful storm of warring passions. Rage, indignation—all the bitter violence of an honourable man's rage, when threatened with irremediable disgrace—all those conflicting emotions that insatiable thirst for retribution and revenge, which seem the natural resource of outraged honour, unless quelled by a stern sense of Christian principles—principles to which, alas! he was a stranger: intense pity for the young and innocent creature so wickedly betrayed—love, which not all her faults could abate; intense, as only parents know: sad returns upon himself—mournful, regretful visions of that happiness so long enjoyed—cruel irritation against circumstance—bitter self-questioning, and bitter regret. . . .

The chaos within! the strife against the inevitable! the war against the arrangement of things! that searching in a wide and dreary prospect, where no spirit dwelt, where no eye divine of love and pity penetrated, where no hope of better and fairer—of a future where innocence should be manifested and crime punished—all that attends upon a mind reflecting, penetrating, weighing, as his—upon a heart formed by nature for everything that was lofty, spiritual, loving, and

tender, thus deserted. Such was the state of his mind, struggling amid this storm of the world's worst sorrows, without one guiding light to point to a haven of rest.

Sometimes he started up as one despairing, and looking round his shadowy chamber, over which the moon now gleaming through his casement shed a spectral light, he clasped his hands, or beat his brow in a paroxysm of rage so violent, that it rent a frame formed only for the gentlest and tenderest emotions almost to pieces. Then the vision of his sweet and innocent child arose as it were before him, just as she threw herself upon his breast to ask a pardon—too readily granted—and blushed in her ignorance, with pride and pleasure, at the thought of what had been done.

But at that thought he threw himself back upon his pillow, and bathed it with a flood of agonizing tears.

He had dismissed his daughter, for, indeed, her presence at this moment was more than he found it possible to bear; and when she had returned upon tiptoe to watch whether he was asleep, he had sufficient command over himself to answer her cheerfully that he felt much better, and should be quite well when he had got a little rest.

He had heard her step repeatedly during the night-time coming to his door; had listened as the latch turned softly. Sometimes he had spoken to assure her that he was going on well; sometimes he had feigned sleep to escape her inquiries. He could not bear to make her unhappy by the slightest suspicion of what he was suffering,—to pollute her thoughts by the slightest allusion to his agonizing suspicions would have been worse than death to him.

At last Miriam, reassured, came no more.

She was weary and very sleepy: she felt relieved from a heavy load by the confession she had made, and consoled by the assurance of her father's forgiveness; and she began to feel satisfied that this sudden seizure had nothing to do with her confession. Old Peggy talked of his stomach and cold in his feet, and that master never would take care to change his shoes when he came in; and Miriam was but too glad to think that so it was.

Indeed, she was so entirely without the least suspicion of the circumstances in which she actually stood, that she had not the slightest clue to his feelings; and even if she had understood her position, her ideas upon many subjects were so confused, and her principles so unsettled, that I think she would have felt almost surprised that

her father should so intensely suffer from a state of things, which some of her favourite heroines had taken so lightly.

So the child lay down and slumbered, comforted that all mystery between herself and her father was at an end—filled, too, with a sort of indefinite hope that, now her father was in the secret, all further concealment would—she did not exactly ask herself why—have an end too; that Ridley would be restored to her, and that she should soon go and live with him as other happy wives did with their husbands. And then she planned how comfortably her father should be established in her home, wherever it might be; and as the confusion of approaching slumber gathered over her thoughts, vision upon vision, soft and most delightful, succeeded each other, till she fell fast asleep—the sweet confiding sleep of nineteen—while her father tossed in anguish upon a pillow covered with thorns for her sake.

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The morning dawned most sweet and lovely—the pale clear light diffused itself through his chamber—he rose from his restless bed of pain, opened the casement, and looked out.

The sweet, tender, green boughs were swaying in the morning breeze; the birds were all alive, piping and whistling among the shrubs and flowers; the dew hung upon the columbines and daisies, the pansies and windflowers, of the pretty garden, opening their sleepy eyes, and expanding to the rising sun.

What an exquisite sense he had once had of these things! How bright and beautiful had this world been to him! If he had not been blessed with those hopes which rest upon a better, great had been his enjoyment of this; and his heart, formed for gratitude and devotion, had not failed to offer its incense of thanks to that *Deity*—that unknown, undefined Power—which had manifested itself to him thus through His works.

But now the glad sun, the soft swaying branches, the busy birds, the cheerful humming bees, the flowers awaking to new life, and spreading forth their beauty to the sun, seemed to him as a hateful mockery; for his heart was full of bitterness. Degradation—shame—irremediable degradation—ineffaceable shame—sorrow, incurable and limitless—were hanging, he knew it well, over the head of his innocent, too unsuspecting child. He loathed the light—he closed his little casement again; he drew round him the russet cur-



tains of his humble bed ; he wanted to be in darkness once more.

His pain was more tolerable in darkness.

When the house began to stir, he again heard the light footstep of his Miriam approaching his door ; she knocked cautiously.

“ I am awake,” he said.

“ May I come in ?”

“ No—not just yet, dear. Go down and get breakfast ; I shall soon be ready. Have you slept, my love ?”

“ Oh, quite well. And you, dearest papa ?”

“ So-so ; but I am better this morning. Go and get breakfast, that’s my dear.”

He was surprised and shocked, when he endeavoured to dress himself, to find his hands trembling like those of a very old man, and his knees knocking together so that he could with difficulty get about : however, he managed to put on his clothes without assistance ; but he was obliged to take his stick in order to walk down stairs.

He opened the breakfast-room door and came, the spectre of what he had been some ten hours before, into the room. As the trembling, shaking, pallid, bowed-down old man appeared—twenty years older than the father of yesterday, Miriam uttered a cry, and starting up, flew to him, caught him in her arms, and burst into tears, exclaiming,—

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“Papa! papa! is that you? How changed—how ill! Surely, surely,” looking anxiously, almost imploringly into his face, “it can’t have been my doing, wretched creature that I am! Papa, it’s not about me—it’s not because I—I—— Oh, papa! papa! my fault I see was great; but, dearest father, it’s all over now—all’s right now! Ridley will only *try* to be angry with me—he can’t really; it was so natural—so impossible to go on longer. Papa! papa! sit down in your chair—let me give you your hot coffee. How you tremble! Oh, father!”——

He had sat down in his chair while all this was pouring forth like a torrent, which he could not, he would not interrupt. He looked at her so lovingly, and tried to smile; but there was a leaden weight upon his heart: it was as when death has entered the house—there may be submission and patience, but consolation there cannot be.

“Rachel, weeping for her children, cannot be comforted.”

“It’s a sweet morning,” said he, trying for something to say, and endeavouring in vain to swallow the coffee she presented.

“Lovely!” she said, and went and pushed the casement a little further open, and the hum of

bees and the whisper of the wind, just fluttering among the bushes, was heard, and the sweet fresh air came blowing in through the woodbine and sweet-brier that mantled round the window-frame.

He turned his face to the fresh air; his heart seemed as if it with difficulty beat—the wheel at the cistern was broken, and the golden bowl from that day shattered: but he felt there was much to be done, and to be done without delay, and as she took her seat again at the table he said,—

“Do you know where Mr. Ridley is now? I must write to him to-day.”

“Oh dear, yes!” and she smiled: “I have his direction.”

“You write to one another, then, still?”

“Still! to be sure we do. Can the time ever come when we shall not? Dear papa, what *are* you thinking of?”

“He writes, then, frequently and kindly?” said he, looking up more cheerfully, and the colour faintly rising upon his sallow cheek, and he took a sip at his coffee, and he uttered a sigh of relief, and said,—

“And his letters are as kind as ever, are they?”

But she recollected the last two letters, and her head drooped, and she muttered,—

“Almost.”

“Almost! and has there been a perceptible change, then?”

“He is only busy and bothered, papa, and has not time. You know we have seen his fine speeches reported in the newspapers.”

“Yes—yes. You would not like me to see one of his letters?”

“No,” said she, blushing crimson; “dear, dear papa, I couldn’t—I couldn’t indeed do it!”

“He calls you his wife in his letters?”

“No; he hates that name—he never uses it. Dear papa, why should he?”

“Go and fetch me his direction.”

And rising from the little table, and pushing his coffee and his untasted bread and butter away, he left the room.

She would rather have written instead of her father; but something in his manner made her afraid to say so.

She wrote down his address, 27 St. Alban’s Street, and determined, as her father chose to write, that she would send a letter at the same time, explaining how things had happened, and imploring his forgiveness for what she had done.

Her father wrote thus:—

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*Mr. Feversham to Ridley.*

“It is a strange tale this that my daughter has at last confided to me, and Mr. Ridley knows as well as I do that the circumstances under which her marriage has taken place cannot be satisfactory to her father. The whole appears to have been concluded in a very irregular manner, and it is due to all parties that these irregularities should be immediately set right, and any defect in form rectified. The best and simplest proceeding in such a case, and which will settle all difficulties, will be by the immediate celebration of a marriage according to the established forms of society; and as Mr. Ridley owes every compensation in his power to the young lady interested, for the risk her reputation has incurred through him, her father trusts that he will instantly procure a special license, and hurry down with all possible speed into Cumberland—thus putting an end to a most humiliating and distressing position, without the unnecessary loss of one moment of time.”

Miriam wrote,—

“Dearest, best-loved Ridley,—I cast myself at your feet! Forgive me if I have done amiss.

My father was so kind, so intensely tender—I told you if you made me unhappy it would all come out. You should not indeed, indeed, Ridley, make any one who loves you so truly as I do, so very, very unhappy as you made me: but it's over now; don't vex yourself about me, I am quite happy again at last. My father was taken very ill the night I spoke to him, and it was a sort of fit, Peggy says; he can't walk or stand scarcely; he's got a shock, and is bent like an old man. If I thought it was his grief that I had deceived him I think it would kill me with remorse; but it couldn't be that, for he did not seem angry the least after the first moment. He was shocked, I saw, then—disappointed in me; but it was soon over, and he was kinder than ever: but guess what I felt when I looked up and saw him speechless. Yes, he was speechless, Ridley, when I had been telling him about that evening, when—when—I was the happiest of brides in that little lovely valley, and you called yourself the happiest of men. He writes by to-day's post, but he has not shewn me his letter. Please, dear Ridley, write differently to him from what you do to me. You are in a hurry, and I don't mind your being a little—a little —— I don't know just what to call it, but it pains me; but if I couldn't bear

a little pain for your sake what should I be worth, indeed! But my father is so poorly; and you know he is your father now, dearest Ridley, because he is mine. You must love him for his own sake, too, I am sure. So, whatever he has written, please take it as it is meant, which I am sure is kindly, and please write an answer that will set his heart at rest. No one in the world can write such sweet, such comforting letters as you do, when you have time; but never mind me, only do pray find time to write a nice letter to my poor father—my dear, dear, dear father!"

Mr. Abel had heard of Mr. Feversham's illness, and in the afternoon he had walked up to inquire after him, to pay him a visit if visible, and offer his services if wanted.

He found his friend sitting in his arm-chair upon the little grass-plot in front of the house, the apple-trees in full blossom were hanging over his head, his gillyflowers—a favourite flower—rich and double, of which he was very proud, filled a little border near him.

All his usual delights surrounded him, upon which he used to dwell with never-fading interest; but now he was sitting in his easy study-chair, his hands hanging sadly down, his eyes bent upon the grass, absorbed in his own

thoughts, and insensible to every thing around him.

Mr. Abel had opened the little wicket and introduced himself, as his custom was; he came up to Mr. Feversham unperceived, and watched him a few moments as there he sat, much shocked and equally astonished at the change in his appearance. It was but three or four days since he had seen him.

He did not stand there looking long, but went up to him, and as he heard his footsteps the suffering man turned hastily round, but, perceiving who it was, he started, roused himself, sat up, seemed trying to dispel the gloom which had gathered over his face, and endeavoured to rise. He could not readily do that, but he stretched out his hand and *contrived* to smile.

His smile told more of the wretchedness within than any gravity could have done.

“I heard you were ill, old friend,” said Abel, “and I walked up to inquire about you.—Why, what’s been the matter? I never saw a man so changed!”

Mr. Feversham looked a little hurried at this, and said,—

“I had an odd sort of attack last night I believe—that’s all. Think no more about it—it’s over!”



“ I wish it may be,” said the plain-spoken Abel, who was a man not easily to be repulsed by an evasion, slow to discover when he was a bore, and ever blundering on in the good intention of his honest heart.

“ But you look very badly, Feversham — no bad news, I hope—nothing going amiss any way! You look like one more afflicted in mind than body, friend,” he said, with increasing anxiety and increasing kindness. “ Tell me, is there nothing in which I can be of service to you?”

“ No, no, don’t think about it—it’s all over! Something had vexed me—it was only for a moment. Don’t let us think any more of it; let us speak of something else.”

“ Where’s Miriam? I wonder to see you sitting by yourself, without your pretty attendant genius,” said Abel.

“ In the house—in the garden—I don’t know—writing letters, I believe.”

“ You are a courageous man to trust pretty Miriam so much to herself,” said Abel, bantering. “ We shall some of us be running away with her some of these fine days, if you don’t look sharp . . . . What’s the matter?” rising, and going up and looking anxiously in his face.

“ A pain, a pain—nothing, nothing!”

“Dear me, I was only joking! You don’t really think I fear any indiscretion upon the part of Miriam?”

“Oh, no, I am sure! but some subjects are scarcely joking matters.”

“Why, one always jokes about pretty girls, and running away with them, you know,” said Abel; “and really I have been quite afraid lately of bringing any of my pupils in this direction, for Miriam is so very pretty, and there’s something about a girl in a garden takes those young chaps so! I thought Ridley’d have gone mad about her, as, indeed, I told you; and—no offence—what would have become of us all if he’d done any thing imprudent? His parents would have been ready to have killed me, in the first place—made a burnt-offering of the poor pedagogue to the Moloch of their pride; and as for you and Miriam——but, thank goodness, that danger’s over! and I believe, though you never owned it, I may thank you for being more prudent than I was. After that visit to you by himself, when I suspect”—trying to look archly in his face—“you were asked, and gave my young gentleman his answer—after that evening when he came back, looking mightily affronted and mightily out of humour, he told me very

abruptly that he thought he must return forthwith to London, and I wasn't sorry to see him off."

"He went away so soon, I never heard that," said Feversham; and he rose up from his recumbent posture in the chair, and seemed to breathe; but then a thought smote him—it was as the recollection of death—of the irreversible decree being passed, suddenly striking down the rallying spirits, and he sank backwards, and said no more.

"Why you went away yourself a few days after, to poor Frost's; and I suppose you and Miriam, when you met again, had other things to talk about than the choppings and changes of my scholastic arrangements."

There was no answer to this. Abel kept talking on:—

"He made a fine speech upon the R—question, however. You read it?"

"No, I seldom read the debates."

"You ought to have read *that*—it's one of the finest this parliament. I wrote to Mr. Ridley, the father, to congratulate him: it really was a subject for it. He thanked me for my letter, and told me there was cause for rejoicing in various ways: his son was to be married in due course of

time, in a most satisfactory manner to them all; a prodigious heiress, a——”

He was interrupted by Mr. Feversham starting suddenly up with a faint cry, as if shot, and as suddenly falling into his chair again.

“Hey-day, my old friend!” cried Abel, “what’s the matter now?”

Feversham made a violent effort with himself—one of those desperate struggles which seem to exhaust life, in one short five minutes, more than in the uniform lapse of as many years. His white, quivering lips, were firmly pressed together; his trembling limbs *commanded* to be still; his distended eye to resume, as far as possible, its usual expression, as he said carelessly,—

“An odd feeling about my heart—merely nervous—not quite well, you know! You were saying something about your quondam pupil being married?”

“Yes. You don’t suppose I care much about the marriages of these young fellows when they cut away from me; but really I had been in the tremors lest we should get into a scrape about your pretty Miriam. And so, you see, I thought you’d perhaps not be sorry to hear it; for, to tell truth, in that gossiping town of ours they’d got something of an inkling, and made up a cock-

and-a-bull story about Ridley and Miriam. I didn't care to vex you about it, but one usually gets a suspicion of things that concern one's self; so I thought perhaps you had: and I thought you'd not be sorry, as I wasn't, to hear a report that the chap was going to be married. I've taken care to tell it all over the town before I came here."

It is impossible to describe the varying expression of the poor father's face. One stretched upon the rack, and resolved to suffer no one cry of pain to escape, might have shewn such a countenance, the distress of which increased as Abel, suddenly stopping in his discourse, looked up and said,—

"What *can* make you look so very uncomfortable? I thought you'd be pleased. I'm sure if you are a wise man you ought to be."

It was impossible to answer this.

Poor Feversham was a stranger to falsehood; he could find nothing to say.

Abel went on:—

"I am sure, my old friend, if you had any hopes for Miriam at one time—which I hardly suppose you had—you have reason to be glad, for her sake, that things have come to this termination. One doesn't like to speak ill of one's pupils," he added, in a low and more serious

tone, "but in spite of his great talents, of which I and all his friends are justly proud, I believe a more hard-hearted, selfish egotist, than Ridley does not exist; and he has habits of profligacy that, in such a character, are more than usually—are *utterly* disgusting."

At this Mr. Feversham laid a hand, cold as stone and almost as rigid, upon Mr. Abel's arm, and saying, "You really must excuse me—I feel so ill I do not know what to do with myself—pray call somebody, or help me to the house," he made a great effort to rise; and as Abel, with all his usual busy goodnature, and more than his usual awkward flurry, helped him as well as he could, he struggled towards the door, saying at intervals, as he made his way in, and at last reached a chair,—

"Don't alarm Miriam—it's nothing! Get me into my study. No, no, don't think of staying! Give me the bell-pull—I'll ring for Peggy if I want her. I shall be better alone—let me be alone! Don't, don't, dear, good Abel! Go away, that's a good fellow, lest you should meet Miriam!"

At last he persuaded the goodnatured *fâcheux* to leave him.

## CHAPTER IX.

“ Oh, let not thus thy mind be overwhelmed —  
True, thy path is perplex'd, and difficulty  
Shadows thee round—and trembling spirits shake  
Thy fixing soul—and darkness terrible,  
The darkness of the mind, clouds over thee!”

ANON.

OH, vice is a hideous thing!—

A hideous, dark mystery—the mystery of iniquity! Its secret springs are hidden from our view, but its more obvious causes and consequences are palpable and demonstrable; and it is with its consequences, in our narrow circle of knowledge, that we alone should attempt to deal.

Many subtle and questioning intellects perplex themselves with the inquiry, Whence the remote, original cause, of the sin and evil around us, and why?—a question it is not given to any man, under the conditions of our present existence, to answer;—but scarcely any one sufficiently fixes

his attention upon that which it is our main business to know, and which we can know,—the efficient causes, and more especially the consequences, of sin.

Oh, if we steadily kept our minds alive to this most important subject of thought—if men, before they *did* evil, would only remember its inevitable results—if all the wide-extended sufferings, the sorrows, the pains, the tears, inevitably following upon wrong, were but present to the wrong-doer at the moment of his crime, it is scarcely possible that heart of flesh could resist the piteous picture—that heart of man but must turn appalled from the criminal course upon which he was about to enter.

But we are selfish, careless, unreflecting, blinded by inclination and passion, or by that darkness worse than death which attends upon the slothful indifference to questions of right and wrong. Men pass from day to day, yielding to the temptations of covetousness or pleasure, thoughtless of consequences to themselves in many cases, almost utterly insensible as regards the results to others.

The true moral painter's part it is to hold up a faithful picture to the heart of the long succession of evils which from one crime spring.

The crime of which Ridley had been guilty,



he, like many of his sex, regarded very lightly—it was but a silly girl betrayed. He did not estimate—how should such a heart as his estimate?—the vast sum of misery included in that small sentence.

The long agonies of a woman's heart, whose affections have been disappointed by the carelessness with which men in ordinary society give rise by their attentions to feelings which are the legitimate and natural return of such attentions, is a very serious breach of the law of doing as we would desire to be done by—a breach upon which they most of them never reflect at all: but light is this indeed to the crime here perpetrated.

A man should be forced to look steadily into the gulf of despair—or far, far, far worse—of degradation and moral ruin into which, for the gratification of the idlest vanity or licentious passion, he plunges a young, innocent, trusting creature, whose only error, it may be, was to love him too well. Men, if they would reflect, must and would shudder and turn aghast from the horrid, horrid spectacle!

But they will not reflect, they will not learn to shudder; the subject is painful, and they pass it from their mind, with a few wicked commonplaces, at which they are but too ready. Ridley's treachery was double-dyed in wickedness; but

had he not carried his deceit so far—had his victim been a more easy prey, would her fate have been less cruel? As for the fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, of those thus led to folly, no one, of course, thinks of *them*. No man, the slave of his own vices, can be expected to cast a thought upon *them*; the sum of their misery is never even calculated—the figures are not even set down.

And the children!

Reflect upon that; varnish it over as you may, provide for them handsomely if you will, one reflection, at least, make,—what are to be the moral impressions of a child whose being sprang from a parent's sin? I ask you only to think of the dark confusion of affections and principles, on the hardness and indifference, or both, which must be the result. Did Ridley, intelligent, reflecting, a weigher of things, a deep searcher into metaphysical and moral truths, a man with, at least, all the intellectual elements which ought to form a great man—did Ridley ever trouble himself once to consider these things, things so nearly connected with his own and with another's soul?

No—certainly.

His was an imagination;—ah, were mine as bright!—that might have painted to him, in living images, all the consequences of his criminal self-

indulgence and most wicked treachery. His mind had power, had it possessed the will, to draw with the pencil of Dante, the appalling picture of that inner hell to which he had condemned the being he pretended to love — once *had* loved. And the poor father! — the agonies of the gentle, unoffending man, who had welcomed him so hospitably under his lowly roof; whose heart was so full of kind affections, so free from guile, or jealousy, or pride! Yes, Ridley possessed power to have pictured in a way my feeble hand vainly attempts to do, the long death of the soul, the awful dark despair, of a father wounded in a daughter's honour.

A parent disgraced in his own loving, innocent child. He shall render a heavier account for all this, because he is great, and gifted, and wise, and powerful, and fitted to guide a state and rule the interests of a nation—he shall be the less forgiven, because in the plenitude of his powers he has chosen to step aside to crush a poor little insect in its humble path—he shall be the less forgiven, because the wider the knowledge, and the higher the intellect, and the larger the observation, so much the greater is the power of estimating the claims and appreciating the sufferings of whatever breathes; and that the thoughtless

cruelty which we lament and pardon in the untutored child, is odious, is execrable in the man !

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Ridley read Mr. Feversham's letter with feelings of vexation and anger, but with not one spark either of sympathy or pity. He was excessively annoyed at the revelation having been made to her father by Miriam — that is a matter of course ; but the tone of the letter irritated him exceedingly. His pride, of which he had an immense portion, was aroused by the plain terms of equality assumed by the lowly man of worth towards the exalted doer of wrong ; upon the eve of a most splendid marriage, there was something to him ridiculous in thus putting forward the humble, and as he knew, utterly valueless claims of Miriam.

The ceremony which she had looked upon as so sacred and binding, he had scarcely regarded from the first as anything but a farce to satisfy scruples which, after all, were rather inconsistent with the principles she professed. The confusion of her ideas upon the subject of the marriage relation had, perhaps, encouraged in him the hope that it might altogether be dispensed with ;

but when he found that poor Miriam, in spite of her high-flown notions, was, after all, too much of a real English girl to act upon them, he yielded to her wishes. At the moment—for few are deliberately wicked—he, as I have hinted, perhaps intended it as a marriage that might, if he pleased, be confirmed at some future time; but, whatever the feelings under which the base deception was had recourse to, in a very short time, as every one in the least acquainted with the human heart will feel sure, he got into the habit of regarding the whole business as a mere passing affair, and not in the slightest degree as giving Miriam any claim upon his future—unless, indeed, so far as some pecuniary compensation might be concerned.

He had for the last few weeks become peculiarly anxious to disentangle himself from the connexion; and it was certainly not less in contempt than anger that he read, his lip curling with a sarcastic and scornful smile, the demand made by Feversham of a special license, and an immediate and more regular repetition of the marriage ceremony.

Miriam's note he then opened, but threw it hastily aside at the first two sentences, with an impatient "Pish!" Then sitting down at his

writing-table, he hastily took up a pen, and wrote his answer to the father, thus : —

“SIR,

“I have the honour of your communication, and am sorry I cannot agree with you in your views of its subject-matter. I regret that it is entirely out of my power to comply with your request—I might better call it demand—but I beg to say at once, that any other compensation for the injury done to your family I shall be happy to make. We shall not find it necessary, I am sure, to appeal to the decision of others with respect to the extent of such compensation. I believe you to be just and moderate in your views. My means, thank God, of satisfying them, are pretty considerable; you have only to name what you require, and a cheque upon my banker shall satisfy, as far as such things can be satisfied, every claim you may imagine your family possesses against me.

“I have the honour to be, &c. &c.,

“GEORGE RIDLEY.”

To Miriam, not a word.

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“ My dearest father, you don’t eat a morsel — you were gone to bed when I came in last night ; and you were gone out before breakfast this morning. You should not do so, papa ; you look so ill — do try to taste something. You had no breakfast before you went out — do try.”

“ No, my child — don’t ask me ; I would rather not, indeed.”

“ Papa, papa, you frighten me very much. You are very ill, or else —— is your letter come ? and, oh ! was it unkind ? He couldn’t — he wouldn’t write so to *you* ; I am sure he would not.”

“ Eat your dinner, child, and don’t think about me. Nay, eat your dinner, Miriam.”

“ How can I, when you look so ill ?”

There were tears in his eyes ; his eyes were full of tears as he looked at her.

He had walked to the town the evening before, scarcely expecting a letter by return of post ; but a letter was put into his hand. He had, during the last eight-and-forty hours, in some way buoyed himself up with the hope, that to an appeal so direct there could be but one answer ; and however much he might deplore the jeopardy in which his daughter had placed her happiness, that her honour would at least be safe.

The Grecian painter drew a veil over the coun-

tenance of the father in the well-known story — I find myself utterly incapable of describing the storm that passed over the father's heart, when he read the insolent and unfeeling letter.

But his strongest impulse, after the first agonies of his feelings had subsided, was to conceal this barbarous cruelty from his daughter. Bitter as were his own feelings, and raging as his mind, still he could consider how far more bitter must be her anguish, her indignation how far more cruel !

He did not come back home, but hurried into the mountains behind, seeking the most savage and secluded glen ; and there, among the bare and blackened rocks, he paced to and fro, endeavouring to quiet the storm within, and to meet his child without betraying himself. The stars came out and glittered over his head ; the crescent moon cast faint shadows amid the rocks ; but he could not cast up an appealing glance to that sky, which, with all its starry phalanxes, was without speech for him : he had but his own manly spirit — he had but his own susceptible, loving, sincere, honest heart, to battle with this cruel spectre of evil which had encountered him.

This world lay a ruined chaos of hopes and affections shattered, and there was nothing better to turn to.



It was a long and fatal struggle; resentment and indignation were such strangers to his gentle nature, that the violent passion of rage, the hungry cry for vengeance and redress that filled his heart, seemed tearing up the very foundations of his being. How long these hot and fiery feelings lasted, I know not; they were drowned at last by floods of tears, as he thought of his daughter's fate.

These tears, cruel as they were, in some degree calmed the violence of his agitation; but, quite unequal to meet her that evening, he had stolen in through the kitchen, had told Peggy not to forget to take her young mistress her supper, telling her he was sorely tired with a long walk, and wished to go to bed and not to be disturbed; and he once more had crept up stairs, thrown himself, dressed as he was, upon his mattress, and again spent the night without closing his eyes.

His thoughts that night might be called rather a hurried succession of horrible spectres than anything approaching to reflection or consideration. As the morning dawned, he rose, and utterly unable to meet his child, and almost to speak to living being, stole forth a second time, and buried himself among the mountains.

In the same hurried, almost delirious species of misery, he spent that morning; but as his bodily

strength began to be exhausted, and to sink under the tremendous excitement he had undergone, his spirit flagged with it, and he longed to go home, and seek support and comfort from the presence of some one.

So he had come slowly home, creeping among the mountain clefts ; and he had entered the garden just as Peggy, for the fiftieth time, as she thought, presented herself at the door to look whether “ Master *was* coming, for the steak was quite spoiled.”

He had only time to take off his hat and enter the dining-room, where Miriam met him, looking ill and hurried too ; and, without exchanging a word, they sat down together.

He was not a man of tears. Miriam had never seen her father weep ; but now his eyes were swimming as he looked at her. He thought how pale and ill, poor thing ! she looked ; and his heart was bleeding as he gazed.

He seemed so anxious that she should eat, that she tried ; and besides, Nature was young in her, and called for sustenance : but though he endeavoured to do the same to oblige her, it was utterly impossible ; he played with his knife and fork, and then laid them down.

Suddenly, as she moved, a thought seemed to strike him. He struck his forehead with both

his clenched hands—rose from his seat in a transport of emotion, and hurrying out of the room went quickly up stairs, entered his bed-chamber, and locked and double-locked the door.

Miriam sat a moment in speechless dismay.

Then a terrible, terrible thought, came over her, —and burying her face in her hands, she fell down upon her knees before her father's chair.

Stupid — miserable — confused — her thoughts all in disorder, she could not pray—she did not know how—she was stunned and stupid. She thought herself stony and insensible.

It was tea-time when they met again.

Meals went on in regular succession, as they always do ; the clock of life keeps its monotonous course, scarcely ever affected by the agitation around.

She heard him coming down stairs with a step more composed and measured than had lately been his, and he came in looking much more calm than he had done for many days.

He came up to her and kissed her gravely.

And then, sitting down in his usual place, he said,—

“ My dear, will you put up a few things in my portmanteau, — I intend to set off for London to-morrow.”

“ My dear papa!—you cannot be fit for the

journey — you are not well enough. It is a terrible — terrible long way. You will fall ill upon the road — indeed you must not think of setting out till you are better.”

He shook his head, and smiled in a gently sorrowful manner.

He did not say that which he felt and knew ; that he should not ever be better.

He took Miriam’s hand gravely, and said, in answer to her hurried and agitated remonstrances,

“ Sit down, child, and be calm. You must not agitate yourself in this way. Miriam, we must have strength and fortitude. You must endeavour to be patient, and courageous as you were when you were a little girl. I have had an uncomfortable letter from Mr. Ridley. You thought I could not have got it till this evening, but I got it yesterday ; he wrote by return of post ; you must have miscalculated the time.”

“ I never got a letter so soon,” said she thoughtfully.

“ No,” thought he ; “ the time was already past to write *to her* by return of post.”

His only wish at present, his most strenuous efforts, were directed to spare her feelings—he never thought of his own—far less did he once remember that to her duplicity, to her breach of filial confidence, of daughterly affection and re-

liance, this misery was owing. The shadow of a reproach had never clouded his heart; he felt only the tenderest pity.

To spare her every unnecessary pain was his most anxious care as he went on.

She was too little aware of the position in which she really stood, to have any very great anxiety as to the subject-matter of the letter; she was only anxious about the *manner* in which Ridley might have written. Her father was most earnestly desirous to conceal from her as long as possible the cruel truth—the degrading truth—which he felt would crush her to the earth at once, and degrade her in her own eyes for ever.

Among his other thoughts, sometimes he hoped that she might die before the cruel secret must be disclosed—before shame had dyed that face with its deep crimson.

He felt in moments of excitement as if—like Virginius—he too could by his own hand have cut the thread of life, to save her from disgrace. As he saw her full of innocent confidence, her fair face yet unstained with the deep tincture, her heart yet unbowed to degradation, he felt that so to preserve her, he or she would have died well.

“The letter is in some respects not altogether satisfactory, my dear,” he continued, still holding her hand. “I think it is better there should be

a personal interview — such things are best not delayed. I mean to set out by the Penrith coach to-morrow, my dear; it passes through Askridge at seven o'clock."

"I hope—I hope—what can it be, dear papa? What can there be amiss, that a letter would not set right?" she began anxiously.

"Things, my dear, that it is needless to explain—matters of form. My love, don't make yourself uneasy; keep quiet and rest yourself while I am away, Miriam. Remember how precious is health to all, and don't be in the least uneasy about me. I feel that this journey will set things right."

"Ah, papa!"

"Mind what I say, my dear, pray do. Try to compose your spirits while I am away, and you will be left to yourself, love, and not have your poor father to worry you!"

He looked so tenderly as he spoke.

"Ah, papa!—papa!" and a feeling more nearly akin to remorse than she had yet felt smote upon her heart as she looked at him.

But she was not even yet alive to a full sense of the ingratitude of which she had been guilty.

## CHAPTER X.

“ And weep the more because I weep in vain ! ”

It was a lovely morning.

He opened his window at six, and looked out upon his peaceful little domain.

Spring had passed away, and Summer in all her English beauty had set in — summer, which in this country is a season so exquisitely tempered to loveliness and to perfect enjoyment.

His garden was in one glow with its profusion of flowers of every hue, vying with each other in the gayest exuberance ; and amid those flowers the fruit-trees, his pear-trees, his espaliered apples, his gooseberries and currants, now just beginning to glow under their green leaves, once more presented that picture which had charmed Ridley so much upon his first visit, about twelve months ago.

What ruin had entered the little Eden since the fiend overleapt the wall !

He stood there ready dressed for his journey, and looked down upon the scene.

The garden spread before him ; then came the common, now gay with gorse in all its golden glow ; and further on, the mountains rose in their sublimity around.

The newly risen sun was beaming upon their breast, and gently dispelling the morning veil of mist which rolled up softly upon their moistened sides.

The distant sounds of beginning labour might be heard ; the distant call of voices, the cheerful crowing of chanticleer, the yelps of dogs, the rumble of the slow wheel, all mingled together with that soft awakening charm which makes the opening day so bright and cheerful.

How often had he stood at that same window, and gazed in the fulness of an overflowing content upon this scene of all his innocent delights, drinking in with an intensity of sensibility—which only those exquisitely tempered as he was know—all the delicious impressions that surrounded him !

Now the whole was covered as with a funereal veil.

He looked upon that garden which he had loved as a companion—almost as a friend—down



upon those plants he had tended with so much care and pleasure, and he sighed.

The dreariest desert upon earth could not have possessed less power of exciting in him the sense of pleasure than did that lovely scene now.

The man within was paralysed—was dead.

He would not quit his room till the time of his departure approached, he thought—he did not wish to be too long with his Miriam. He was wretched when in her presence, from the apprehension that by some inadvertence he might betray his secret, and inflict the misery he wished to bear alone.

The idea of her even remotely surmising the real situation in which she stood was more dreadful to him than all the rest; he dared not cast his eyes that way; he was forced to hope something would occur, and that this she would be spared.

It was possible that his presence and remonstrances might have greater weight than his letter. Sometimes he thought it could not be in man to resist words, such as an injured father alone could speak. At others he thought she would die. It might be of disappointed affection; but he trusted not to see her heart broken with shame.

At a quarter to seven he came down stairs, and

found her, as he expected, waiting for him. She looked very pale and ill.

She had passed the most miserable night she had yet known—for it was a night of remorse and self-reproach.

About to become a parent herself, things had struck her in a new light. Perhaps no one, till they in their turn are parents, can by possibility appreciate what they owe as a child, or the force of that affection, or the amount of its tenderness and care. No child on earth can understand this fully till they lavish upon another's infancy all the watchful anxiety which has guarded their own. Even the best child often feels something approaching to remorse when reflecting upon this. What must be the misery of a heart naturally good, when some great breach of duty has been committed, and the heart betrayed and agonised that doated with such disinterested affection?

Thoughts such as these had haunted her throughout that sleepless night. How barbarous her insensibility had been to her father's feelings, in favour of one — a stranger — though a lover! How bitter — ah! worse than serpent's tooth — to have a thankless child! She was worse — a deceiving, treacherous, false, unnatural child! How they had lived together! How tender and kind

he had been ! Her memory, too faithful monitor now, recalled all those unnumbered evidences of his gentle affections—from the time when, a little one, she sat upon his knee, prattling and playing with his face as he smiled upon her—or caught up crying in his arms, after some infant misfortune, had been hushed to sleep upon his bosom.

His patient lessons, his unwearied endeavours rightly to direct her thoughts ; his anxiety and care for her when ill ; his pride and pleasure in her health and gaiety ! and then she asked herself—for now she began in some degree to understand how these things must be—what must have been the misery of his feelings when he first discovered the unworthy return she had made ?

No wonder he looked ill. His pallid face began to haunt her like a spectre : *began*, I say—it was a spectre never afterwards to be laid.

He came into the room looking still more feeble, still more pallid, still more ill, than she had yet seen him.

She went up to him, looked at him a few moments in silent sorrow, and then she said in a low, faltering, hurried voice,—

“ Papa, before you go away I must just speak one word. It is only to tell you, that, at last, I see what I have done—how very wickedly and ungratefully I have behaved ; but, papa, you must

forgive me, if you can.—With the duty of a whole life—with the earnest devotion of my whole future life,” she added, passionately, “I will try to make amends.”

He stooped down and kissed her, his eye glistening.

He had not uttered the slightest reproach or complaint, but this spontaneous return upon herself evidently touched and gratified him very much.

“Good, dear child!” he said, fondly, “thank you for saying this just before I set out—it comforts me very much, my dear. It was too late to point out your error, and I felt that now it would only give you useless pain; but I believe that we are all the better and the more comfortable, when we have been wrong and given a friend pain, for confessing and asking forgiveness. My darling, darling girl! don’t hang your head and cry so bitterly! Kiss me, my darling love—my dear, dear child!—you have done your poor father’s heart good, love, by saying what you did. Don’t cry any more. Nay—nay, it was not so much—girls will be foolish sometimes. Kiss me, my love—it’s all made amends for now. Let us think no more of that, my dear, dear child.”

Do you think such words could stop a child’s tears? Hers flowed freely, plentifully, but it

was a blessed—a refreshing shower to both. Under the influence of that heaven's dew, which flows from a broken and contrite heart,—under the influence of that gentle glow, which a true reconciliation diffuses amid the deepest sorrow, they embraced and parted.

The father took his staff, and sallied forth to meet the coach, and the daughter dried those abundant tears, which his tender forgiveness had sweetened.

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How Miriam passed the time of his absence it seems almost useless to relate.

She dwelt with her own thoughts almost entirely, for, except a visit or two from Mr. Abel, who called in now and then to see how she was going on during his friend's absence, she saw no one. She began to dislike appearing in the town, and she no more stole after sunset to the post-office for her letters; indeed, now that the necessity for concealment was over, as the days were long, and she could not till very late take advantage of the dusk, she had abandoned that little excursion altogether, and contented herself with sending Peggy. She might have spared herself the trouble of doing even this, for no letters came.

She would hear from her father upon his arrival in London, but it would be five days before that letter could arrive ; but every post must, as she thought, bring an answer from Ridley. There is no more sickening, harassing feeling, than the daily disappointment of an excited hope ; and to this was now added the bitter sense, which daily and hourly became bitterer, of her ungrateful, undutiful conduct to her father. Her imagination now taking a cruel revenge in its reaction, for the very errors into which, by its delusions, she had been betrayed, painted him with barbarous fidelity and truth, with that suffering face, those feeble knees and shaking hands, yet still with that ineffable expression of gentleness and love upon his face with which he looked at her. She pictured him travelling in an uneasy public vehicle, or rather upon the roof of it, exposed to all the changes of the weather,—the heat by day, which happened at this time to be terrific, and the cold dews of night which succeeded.

His goodness, his care, his exertions in her cause—her deception, her ingratitude, even the infidelity of her affection, which had led her to prefer the new and too interesting stranger to the old and well-tried friend,—a sentiment which most good children feel when first, in the course of nature, that severance is made, and leaving

father and mother they cleave to that love which is henceforward to be stronger than all,—even this natural and softly-melancholy feeling, aggravated by her remorse, assumed a form of strange, exaggerated wrong. She had never been accustomed to weigh her relative duties justly—indeed, duty was a word with which she had as yet but little acquaintance; her affections flowing in their natural course, had prompted her warm and loving heart to the performance of all those acts of filial observance and piety which are due from a child to a parent such as hers. She had never found her duties and her inclinations in contradiction before; it was her first temptation, and inclination had triumphed.

We pray not to *enter* into temptation.

Do we very well reflect upon the full force of the prayer?

Not to *enter* into temptation!

No one who has been in the habit of observing his own heart well, and has discovered how little in the moment of temptation, when once the evil influence has laid hold of us, we are capable of calling to mind, in the midst of excited passions, the resolutions, the principles, the honest purposes, of cooler hours, but will pray, and pray fervently, to be preserved from *entering* into temptation. Once entered in—once involved in

the mysterious labyrinth of evil, the foregone conclusions seem to vanish from the mind, and we are hurried on, as by some power beyond our strength, to awaken when the wrong, whatever it may be, has been committed, to a full sense of our misery and our infirmity.

Her love for Ridley had been strong, generous, devoted, as was her nature, but equally blind and passionate, and under its influence she had lived in a sort of delusive dream, which had obscured the sense of all other and less vehement feelings. She had forgotten, like many another child, in her passionate attachment to her lover, the claims of that being who had fostered her from her birth. But the Nemesis, though she may delay, never proves unfaithful to her awful task; sooner or later, the cry of the avenging deity is heard in the heart—sooner or later, the wrongful doer meets his sentence.

These feelings acted upon a frame already so much excited and disordered with a strange, irritating, and oppressive force, as, abandoned to her own reflections—now shedding tears over the cruel neglect of Ridley—now stung by her own self-reproaches—walking, now slowly, now hastily up and down that little gravel-walk between the trees, sometimes haunted by the pale vision of her father, sometimes by the aspect of



that form for ever dear—that face so full of passionate devotion, those eyes which fascinated her very heart as they fell upon her,—she again seemed to drink in those magic sentences which had caused her so much misery and wrong.

What she suffered in the unbroken solitude in which she lived was, as it will easily be believed, almost more than she could support, and the daily diminution of her strength—the daily increasing hurry of her spirits and confusion of her thoughts, would have alarmed any friend who had observed her; but she had only one friend, poor thing! and he was far away.

The fifth day brought a letter from her father. The letter was brief and hurried. He attributed both to his anxiety to save the post; but the almost illegible manner in which the letter was written, the crooked lines, and half-formed letters, betrayed the shaking, nervous hand which had penned it.

He said he had arrived safe, but had not yet seen Ridley; that he had put up at the New Hummums, Covent Garden, and begged her to write to him there. He mentioned nothing of his health, or of his hopes.

## CHAPTER XI.

“Till Hope deserted, long in vain his breath  
Implores the dreadful, untried sleep of death.”

WORDSWORTH.

MR. FEVERSHAM, the morning after his arrival in town, which he reached about eight o'clock in the evening, had presented himself at Ridley's door. That gentleman occupied a house in the, at that time, fashionable St. Alban's Street, where he kept up a handsome bachelor's establishment. It was about ten o'clock in the forenoon when Mr. Feversham presented himself at the door, and Ridley was, of course, at breakfast.

“A strange gentleman wishes to speak a few moments with you, sir,” said his footman.

“Shew him up,” said Ridley, who was sitting at his breakfast-table, in his luxurious and comfortable arm-chair. He had the newspaper in

his hand, and had been just running over the report of his own speech in the last night's debate with considerable satisfaction ; for he was already become one of those of whose harangues reporters think it worth while to take accurate and elaborate notes : he afterwards had been looking over the list of those present at the Tuesday night's opera, and dwelling, with a sort of foolish pleasure, upon the name of the Lady Angelina.

“ Shew him up,” without taking his eyes from the paper, which, however, he cast aside as the door opened, and rising up, to his astonishment confronted Mr. Feversham. He started involuntarily, but he lost not his presence of mind.

“ Shut the door, Johnson,” said he, to his servant, “ and bring a fresh cup and saucer ; this gentleman has probably not breakfasted.”

“ Don't take that trouble, sir,” said Mr. Feversham, turning to the servant, who was leaving the room ; “ I have breakfasted—I shall not take anything more.”

He remained standing where he was till the servant had left the room and closed the door, though Ridley, who, without saying more, had pointed to a chair, had by this time resumed his seat. Then he came up, and confronted him with a stern and steady countenance, and his eye fixed upon his in a manner which seemed to force the

criminal before him to drop his eyelids. He said,—

“I am come to demand justice, and not hospitality.”

“You shall have it,” said Ridley, raising his eyes, and endeavouring to assume a manner as firm and composed as his own. But it would not do; his colour changed rapidly, and his voice was unsteady.

“I hoped so,” was Mr. Feversham’s reply, after a moment’s pause, still fixing his clear blue eye upon Ridley’s face; but the severity of his countenance slowly relaxing,—“I hoped so—I trusted that a personal appeal to your honour and feelings would not be without avail. I am glad to find it so.”

And then he sat down opposite to Ridley, and went on.

That pallid, attenuated shadow of the man Ridley had first seen, sat down before him, and, in a calm, steady voice, but hollow as that of one who had been within the shadow of death, laying his arm upon the table, as if to support a frame which, feeble as it evidently was, neither blenched nor trembled, he repeated the sentence,—

“I trusted, and not in vain—I am glad to find it so.”

Ridley moved in his chair uneasily.

He perfectly well understood what was implied by Mr. Feversham's speech, but as he had not the slightest idea of justifying any expectations of this kind, it was necessary to be explicit ; but there was something in the appearance of the father—his grave severity, his calm air of superiority, that imposed even upon the world-practised and hardened Ridley, and he felt excessively nervous and uncomfortable, as he stammered, rather than said,—

“ I am here to answer—to satisfy any demands that you—that the young lady, may imagine she has upon me.”

“ Imagine she has upon you !” echoed Mr. Feversham, rising from his chair and approaching him,—“ imagine !”

“ Nay—nay,” said Ridley, trying to assume a look of defiance, which, unnaturally excited as were his feelings, became, without his intending it, one of insolence ; “ nay—nay, sir, don't be impetuous. The young lady must understand very well our relative situations, and she cannot suppose, nor have led you to suppose, that a man can do more than I have offered to do, and will be ready and proud to do, to atone for the idle indiscretion of an hour.”

“ Sir,” said Feversham, his whole face crimsoning with passion, coming close up to Ridley, “ repeat that, and if I were to die for it upon the spot

I would strangle you ! I come here," he said, raising his eyes, as if to invoke the powers of justice and retribution,—“ I come to demand reparation for a daughter's wounded honour—I come to demand that the pledges made before God should be redeemed before man. Far rather than thus bestowed would I, if so it had pleased God, have seen her confined at my feet ; but other remedy now there is none.”

Ridley had started up from his seat at the fiery threat and passionate gesture of rage which had accompanied it ; but mastering his own rising passion, for one glance at Mr. Feversham's feeble frame made him ashamed of indulging it, he sat down again, and looking as cool and composed as he could, said,—

“ I was not intending to affront you ; you had better sit down, I think, if you have any thing further to say. I can forgive much from a man feeling as you must necessarily do. I am very sorry that my desire to make compensation should have excited you so much : but what can I do now ?

“ I wish to Heaven,” he went on, seeing Feversham made no answer, for indeed he was too much overcome by rage and indignation to be able to articulate ; “ I wish to Heaven she and I had never met. I grieve very sincerely over

what has occurred—believe me I do—nay, I am free to confess that I did very wrong—but who would have imagined a girl like Miriam would have been imposed upon by so stale a pretence, if she had not herself wished to be deceived?”

“Don’t dare mention her name!” interrupted Feversham, fiercely; then making a dreadful effort to command himself, he said, “There is but one thing which a man with the slightest principle of honour in his breast could think of proposing to do upon such an occasion, and this I am come to demand. And I insist upon my demand being complied with. Farther than this,” he went on, “I ask and will accept nothing—I shall, and wish to keep my daughter—all I claim is, that the breach in her honour—or rather yours, I might say, shall be repaired; and that this be done without a moment’s unnecessary delay. I shall be ready to quit London with you at six o’clock this evening.”

“Then my only answer is,” said Ridley, who had now quite recovered his coolness and self-possession, “that this demand I shall *not* comply with; I have made up my mind upon the subject, and it is better to say so at once. The young lady, whatever her charms and accomplishments,—and who more sensible to them than I?—is not one exactly whom I should wish to present to my

mother as my wife; the circumstances under which I stood must be my excuse for the transgression into which a foolish passion has hurried me; but I have ever held it a weakness, unworthy any man of sense, to sacrifice a life to atone for the follies of a day. Upon the other subject—just compensation—I am open, as I have repeatedly said, to any application she or you may choose to make;" and then rising proudly and insolently, he said, "As I have engagements that cannot wait, you must excuse me bidding you a very good morning. Any further communication to me I think, after what has just passed, will be more agreeably conveyed in writing."

And before Mr. Feversham could answer, he had passed him and left the room. He went hastily down stairs, and telling the servant who waited in the hall, upon no consideration whatsoever to let that gentleman enter his house again, he took his hat and went out, and the door shut after him.

He had not, however, cruel and insolent as was his conduct, quite sufficient heartlessness to keep his appointment; he felt excessively annoyed and uncomfortable; so he went down to his stables, called for his horse, and, unaccompanied by his groom, rode out of town, and



among the lanes about Edgeware spent that day. Neither was he at his place in the house that night; the next evening, however, he was to be found there, and everything henceforward seemed to go on with him as if nothing particular had happened.

He had seen the father's whitening lips and look of bitterness—that expression of impotent rage and unutterable despair, which belongs to the feeble and defenceless, crushed to the earth beneath the iron heel of the oppressor, but in it was no appeal to a Power whose avenging eye follows the criminal, who is the righter of those who have no one to assert their cause.

The expression of the father's face as he quitted the room, it took Ridley two days and one night to get over; and as he felt so long upon the subject, I suppose we must not consider him as an utterly unfeeling man.

It is certain he did not think himself so, and believed—and that might be true enough—that he had given more to past memories than a great many men in his circumstances would have done.

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It was his daughter's honour which was concerned.

Bitter it is to sue, even under the most favourable circumstances—bitter, inexpressibly bitter, when the heart is burning with resentment, and the sense of unexampled injustice and injury : but he would not be discouraged ; day after day might the poor, attenuated, broken form of the father, be seen slowly coming up St. Alban's Street, and again and again requesting to see Mr. Ridley.

Mr. Ridley, call when he would, was never at home.

He wrote.

The first note was returned with a few words at the bottom of the page, to say, that to any proposal, such as he could listen to, Mr. Ridley would send an answer.

Every other note was returned, opened, but without the least word of remonstrance or reply.

Parliament sat late, the summer was excessively hot ; the Parks were burned to sandy deserts ; the air in the streets was stifling. In his little hot lodging-room sat the wretched father, fast wasting under the influence of his misery and his indignation—an indignation which kept alive all the acutest sense of his misery, and prevented the cooling balm of patience from soothing his agonies.

What he suffered during the fortnight he stayed in town, it exceeds my powers of description to relate.

At last his money was becoming exhausted—he wanted the means to supply himself with more—the heartbroken man prepared to return home.

He was now become so weak that he found it difficult to walk, sometimes even to stand—he felt that life was fast ebbing from him. A sinking despondency had succeeded to his agonies of indignation and despair—a hopeless and melancholy patience to the first tumults of his soul—those spoke of life and energies still in their vigour, these of a broken heart and dying frame.

He wanted to get home to his daughter—he longed, with the intense longing of the dying, to behold her once again, lay his head upon her bosom, forgive her and die. To live seemed impossible—to live to witness her disgrace! He did not—for he wanted strength even for that—he did not think much of what would become of her when he was gone; he did not wish to live a little longer for her sake; he felt so utterly languid, helpless and useless, so shaken at the heart's core, that all idea of protecting or assisting her was at an end—a profitless

burden upon her hands, a useless, helpless weight upon the world, he felt himself to be. All his fine talents, all his ardent aspirations after the progress of science, his search after truth, were at an end; the light of his life, which had given animation and interest to all these things, was withdrawn: it was as if the sun were turned into sackcloth of hair, and all was a morningless night.

You should have seen him stepping into the coach, wan, feeble, shrunk, and bent forward, as if with extreme old age; he managed with much suffering to bear the motion of the carriage, and the constrained and cramped posture for some time, but at the town of B——, where the coach stopped, as the phrase went, to sup, they were forced to lift him out of the carriage; he fainted away as he entered the house, and they carried him in this state up to bed.

It was impossible he should proceed further.

He lay all that night in a sort of dreamy, half delirious sleep; in the morning, the landlady came in to inquire how he felt himself, and what she could do for him.

He opened his heavy eyes, and thanked her, but said, he only wanted one thing; some one to write to his daughter. He had a daughter, he said, who would be anxiously expecting him.

The landlady was a kind-hearted widow ; not bonny, fat, merry, and fair, full of smiles, and radiant with health and joyous with liberty newly acquired, but an aged woman, whose wrinkled brow and faded cheek told of present cares and sorrows past. She had known what it was to suffer—for death had been busy in her household, and the best loved of her heart were slumbering in the grave. A childless mother—a widow indeed—widow of one she had loved from her youth, she still kept on the inn, and employed herself unremittingly in the business incident to that anxious and fatiguing life, for the sake of two nephews of her husband—all that was left of him. She knew when his own children were buried one after the other, till his household hearth was void and desert, that he had desired these youths should succeed him.

The excellent Mrs. Payne was one among many instances, to shew that it is not the part we have to play, but the spirit in which we perform it, which makes the difference between man and man. The life of an innkeeper, so full of temptations to irregularity and disorder, to thoughts engrossed with worldly cares, and time entirely devoted to matters of the passing

day, was powerless to impair that pious and devoted spirit—affectionate to those she loved,—strict in duty, filled with piety to God; so she had begun, and so she remained.

And now she stood by his bedside in that little coach-inn; his small chamber, with its walls of plank, and little low window towards the street, looking comfortable from the excessive neatness and good order which pervaded it. Dressed in her widow's mourning and widow's cap, with a tumbler of lemonade in her hand, begging of him to drink and cool his parched lips, and to tell her whom she should send to, and what she could do for him.

“For, indeed, sir, I am afraid, by your looks, that you are very ill, and will not be able to move yet awhile; and I hope you will let me write to your friends.”

And he had answered:—

That he felt himself quite incapable of taking anything; and that he had only one friend in the world, his daughter, who would be uneasy about him. He wanted to see her, he said, before he departed upon that last journey, which, sooner or later, we must all take; only he feared the fatigue of the journey for her.

“I think,” he said, raising his head upon his

hand from his pillow; "that I might be able, perhaps, to go on to-night—how far are we from Kettlewell?"

"Sixty miles, sir; and indeed," said the good widow, "after the state in which you came in last night, I do not think you could move, or ought to attempt it at present. If this house is noisy, which I fear it is," she added, "there is a neat, comfortable lodging not far off, where you could be carried, and where you and the young lady could be, as if you were at home together; for indeed, sir," she continued, looking with compassionate interest upon his pale, exhausted face, "unless your daughter is very ill indeed, I am sure she ought to be sent for."

"Do you think so?" said he feebly; his arm sinking, and his head with it, again upon the pillow; "perhaps you are right, lend me pen and ink, if you please."

He tried to write a few words, but his eyes dazzled, the paper swam before him, and his fingers refused to move. He sighed, relinquished the attempt, and said with a gentle patience:—

"I believe I must give it up; will you write for me?"

"Oh yes, sir, certainly; what would you please to have said?"

“MY DEAR CHILD,

“Your father is not quite well enough to write, but he is well enough to dictate these lines; don’t frighten and hurry yourself, my darling; things when at the worst are about to mend. I will write again in a few days, and if I am worse you shall come to me, but don’t think of setting out yet.”

To this the landlady added of herself these lines:—

“MY DEAR MISS,

“I think it my duty to tell you that the poor gentleman is very ill; and I am sure his daughter, or some friend, ought to be with him immediately.”



## CHAPTER XII.

“ So close the ground — and round his shade  
Black curtains draw.”

DR. KING.

THE letter found the poor girl as miserable, perhaps, though as yet not so ill, as her father.

The terrible irritation produced by his letters, which, carefully as he endeavoured to hide the truth from her, could not but fill her with the most dreadful uneasiness, added to the anguish of disappointment with which every succeeding day was filled, as each succeeding day brought no letter from Ridley—the perfect loneliness of her life—the unhealthy sultriness of the weather, were producing the most fearful effects upon her spirits, though the power of life seemed preserved by that mysterious life within her, which belonged to another.

She did not seem to lose much actual strength, but she wasted fearfully every day: her eyes were sunk, her cheek hollow, her once beautiful figure lean and attenuated, whilst a kind of unnatural fire might now and then be seen burning up upon her cheek, and lending a strange and fearful wildness to her eyes.

At last the letter arrived announcing her father's intention of returning home; and while she anticipated his return with a mixture of hope and terror which kept her upon the rack of expectation, the letter from the good landlady was put into her hands.

She wanted but this addition to a cup already full.

But we find sometimes a new strength in extremity. The distress of her mind seemed almost relieved by being diverted from the subject of her almost morbid contemplations; there was still something left to be done—some one else to devote herself to—some one else for whom to tremble. A new misfortune seemed, in some degree, to alleviate the horrible sufferings which arose from constantly brooding over the other, and a power and energy to which she had long been a stranger seemed to revive, as, starting up, the letter in her hand, she told Peggy immediately to prepare for her departure,

saying, that she should leave her to take care of the house while she herself flew to attend upon her father.

The little preparations were soon made: in a few hours she was in the coach, and the following day, as the evening closed, she entered the little town of B——, and alighted at the inn.

“I am very glad to see you, miss,” said Mrs. Payne, “for I fear the poor gentleman is no better; I think he wearies and longs for you,—he will be easier now. I am very glad you are arrived.”

She only answered by begging to be shewn up stairs; and Mrs. Payne, ascending the old-fashioned flight, opened a black door in the little passage of the first floor, and she was admitted into the room.

The first meeting, so anxiously desired, seemed an equal shock to both. The tears started into Miriam’s eyes as she beheld the ravages which disease and anxiety had made upon her father; and he looked in her face, turned away his head, and groaned.

The groan smote upon her heart,—already contrite, humbled, and penitent: and now it fluttered, and now it hurried, as, going up to his bedside, and bending tenderly over him, she said,—

“ Ah, papa ! papa ! how ill you are ! ”

“ My darling ! ” he said, “ you look very ill yourself. Why did you come here ? ”

“ Ah, dearest papa ! do you think your Miriam, in spite of all her wicked ingratitude to you, so utterly changed that she would stay away from you when you were ill ? I got your letter in the middle of yesterday, so I could not have been here before. Don’t think of me, dear, dear papa ! think of yourself. Have you had a doctor ? have you had advice ? ”

“ Advice, my poor darling ! no. It would be a wise doctor, dear girl, ”—taking her hand affectionately, but so gently,—“ a strangely wise doctor that could do good to me. But I am glad you are come, if it has not tired you very much, ” said he, looking at her mournfully ; “ for we have not much time to spare to be together, I am afraid. ”

“ Don’t say so,—don’t say so,—dear, dear papa ! ” the tears running down her cheeks, as she sank on her knees by the bed ; then she took his head in her arms, as she had often done in play when a child, and putting her lips close to his cheek, whispered,—

“ Papa, I have been a wretched girl,—but never mind me—never mind me. I had forgotten my love for you in my love for one who

has been very cruel to me ; but I have been thinking about it all the time while you have been away, and I don't mean to make you unhappy about me any more. Only get well, papa, and it shall be as it used to be before he came among us. I won't be unhappy any more, only get well, papa."

He opened his eyes as she said all this, and looked up at her, but he said nothing. He tried not to groan, but a faint, low groan would escape.

She had yet such confused ideas upon the subject of her marriage, that she had not a suspicion of the cause of his excessive depression ; she attributed it to his sympathy with her desertion—she had no comprehension of the real cause of this agony.

In her childlike confidence in his affection, she believed that all that was wanting to restore his former serenity was to see her happy ; and while she poured forth these few hurried sentences, in her endeavour to console him, her heart, full of remorse for her past conduct, was resolving to conquer every feeling that could interfere with his comfort ; and she believed what she said, that she would for his sake forget all, and again be happy.

" Yes, dear papa, only look up—cheer up your

spirits—get well, and we will be as if all this fearful dream of sorrow had never been,” said she, kissing him.

It was in vain, there was no answer to her caresses. His secret lay like lead upon his breast: he could not—it was impossible for him—to relieve himself of a burden, the weight of which was killing him.

“My dear,” he said, and it was all he could say, “I thank you for saying all this. My dear Miriam, you are very good to say this: but, my dear, it is too late for us both—the decree has gone forth: it is vain to attempt to deceive you—we shall soon be parted, Miriam.”

The words struck with a sudden shock upon her heart; she drew back from where she was kneeling, hanging over and caressing him. Her face became livid.

Yes, she saw it at last—she had killed her father!

She said no more, but rising up from her knees, sat down in a chair by the bedside, and kept looking at him with a sort of stupid despair. He had again closed his eyes, the effort to speak seemed too much for him.

So there she sat watching him, and as she watched fearful thoughts began to rise.

She had killed him—he was going to die!

Her father ! that kind, generous, devoted father ! Was it real ? was it possible ? Had her conduct produced such an effect as this ?

And yet, what had she done ?

Alas ! alas ! the answer to that was written upon her heart in characters of fire. She had been ungrateful, and her ingratitude had broken his heart. The very extent of the suffering consequent upon her deceit seemed to aggravate the crime in her eyes, till she began to look upon herself as a monster.

At last she said, half aloud,—

“ I see how it is—he cannot forgive me.”

At this he turned his head slowly and languidly round, for he was lying with his face to the wall, and said,—

“ What is that you say, my poor child ? *I* forgive you ! What have I to forgive ? You don’t think I am thinking of *that*, poor little girl ! if you were happy I should die content. What else has the poor husk to do when the fruit is disclosed, but fall to the earth and perish ? But——”

“ But what, papa ? Never mind the rest—I will not care—I don’t care—let us be as we were. Nay,” said she, colouring like crimson, and putting her face close to his, “ only have patience, we may be still happier.”

He turned from her, clenched his two hands fiercely, and a curse passed his lips.

She could not understand it, she was astonished at his vehemence, so unlike his usual gentleness and forbearance: and she said,—

“Dear papa, there is something grieves you very much, which you are trying to hide from me. I believe I know what it is. That something has made me very, very wretched for a long time. I wished to hide *that* from you,—it was the consequence of my fault, and I thought I ought to bear it uncomplainingly: you think Ridley has become unkind?”

“My dear,” he said, turning round and fixing his melancholy, serious eyes upon her face, “you have been aware of this change—but there is more—there is *that*”—and his face became contracted with a spasm of rage and pain, “there is far worse than that to be told!”

“Tell it me all,” she said, with a sort of desperate calmness, “I am prepared to hear the worst.”

“The worst! Treacherous, accursed villain,” cried the father passionately, “he intends to deny his marriage.”

“That is not the worst,” said Miriam, mournfully; “if I have lost his heart, what care I for his hand?”



“ Child !” said Feversham, starting up from his pillow ; “ what is that you are saying ?—What incomprehensible stuff is this !—What romantic nonsense you are talking !—hearts !—hands !—he has your honour, wretched child, in his keeping, and he is about to betray it.”

“ Honour !” she repeated mechanically ; “ alas ! then it is true—he does not *love* me after all.”

And she burst into a passion of tears.

Her father seemed irritated beyond measure at these few last words, and at the tears that followed them ; he seized her by the arm, he almost shook it convulsively, as he exclaimed,—

“ Miriam ! Miriam ! unhappy creature ! what do you talk of love ? Do you forget your honour ? Are you so utterly insensible to that as to cry for the love of a wretch like this, who has tarnished your maiden honour ?”

“ I loved him,” she sobbed ; “ I gave him my all—I am his—and no power under heaven can sever the tie which binds us—which I carry below my heart. He will not believe me, but when he knows *all* he will acknowledge the tie. But I have lost his heart—he does not love me—what do I care for the rest ?”

“ Care for the rest, miserable girl ! Care for the rest !” cried the father, almost fiercely—“ Oh,

child! child! is the *sense* of honour utterly destroyed within you? Is that lost with all the rest that a woman should hold dear?"

He loosed her arm, he almost flung it from him.

She turned round and tried to soothe and comfort him, but it was evident that every attempt at consolation on her part only increased the horrible irritation of his feelings.

To find her so utterly mistaken in principle, so insensible to ideas which, in spite of all his theories, were so deeply engrafted in his own nature—ideas which he had worshipped in his own heart as the guardian landmarks of society, and at once the defence and the glory of womanhood, shocked him to a degree that astonished her as much as it agitated him.

She strove to compose him, by speaking as *she* felt, of her indifference to all social ties, when those of the affections were broken. But he had not patience to listen.

"Miserable girl! have done," he cried, "you speak like a fool;" he added, bitterly, "Leave me to myself, I shall be better alone. Wretched infatuation!"

He turned away from her in anger.

He did not understand her; and was as much astonished at her apparent indifference to what

were, in fact, results from the principles he had suffered her to acquire, as she was startled and amazed at his inconsistency.

She began to cry very bitterly as she stood by his bedside, but she dared say no more; her poor thoughts were all in confusion. She had exchanged her vows with Ridley, and if he chose to disallow such vows, yet she viewed them as binding by all the laws of love and nature, and she did not comprehend, could not understand her father's bitter feelings.

But he, like any other father, cared not for all this sophistry now. He saw his child betrayed and dishonoured, and his heart was broken with sorrow, and wild with indignation. In the distraction of his anger he was for once harsh and unjust; but the gentleness with which she met this injustice and harshness disarmed him; and, turning round once more, he held out his hand, saying,

“Forgive me, my poor child, kiss your poor father; I am sorry I spoke so roughly to you, Miriam. You must forgive a poor old man who hardly knows what he says.”

She threw her arms round him, and answered him by her kisses, sobs, and tears.

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To tell the truth, she still clung to the idea of this exchange of vows—for we can no longer call it a marriage—being valid, and to the hope that Ridley's affection would be restored in time. She thought much of the hurry of business in which he was engaged, and persuaded herself that his alienation was temporary and but natural. After this slight but painful explanation, if explanation it can be called, the subject was dropped between the father and child. She continued to attend upon him with the tenderest assiduity; and he, having once performed his duty, as he thought it, and laid her situation before her, could not bear to disturb the fleeting moments by any further recurrence to it.

He sometimes marvelled at her composure; but more often sinking with those sensations of bodily exhaustion and weariness which were bringing him rapidly to the grave, he lay there in a state of half-insensibility, and seemed incapable of even feeling that agonising sense of distress, rage, and shame, which had caused such cruel ravages.

He lingered in this state for several months before nature was completely exhausted, and before his wearied eyelids were closed in death.

The last dim and fitful glances which his

yearning eyes cast upon her before the spirit departed into the unknown world, shewed her perfectly changed. Her face had become very pale and thin, her whole appearance haggard, and her eyes gloomy; she strove to conceal this by an air of assumed composure and cheerfulness whenever she entered his room; and faint and drowsy as there he lay, she in some degree succeeded: but, as the closing hour approached, as her only friend and protector lay before her rapidly sinking into the grave, as all hopes of his final recovery with which she had so long buoyed herself up, disappeared; as the tender father, protector, and friend—him whom she almost adored, and whom she had so unfeelingly betrayed and deceived, grew worse and worse, and the last hour visibly approached,—the anguish she had so long striven to conceal became impossible to repress; and, in a paroxysm of despair that mocks words, the unhappy pair parted for this life.

There was no Father of the fatherless for him, to whose mercy he could commit his injured child. He looked forward, all was one misty scene of doubt and confusion—around him all was evil. Sin had entered at his door, and creation became to him only one hopeless, miserable blot and deformity. He knew of no region where

was light divine, and where were truth and holiness, and pity for the erring and the miserable who called for it.

He died without consolation.

And left her desolate and alone.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ He holds him with his glittering eye —  
The wedding-guest stood still,  
And listens like a three-years’ child.”

COLERIDGE.

It is a cold, rainy evening, at the end of September; the wind howls and whistles among the trees; the skies are pouring down a pitiless rain without pause or intermission; the night is dark, and there is no moon.

The distracted traveller struggles on.

She is on foot, and she carries an infant in her arms.

The bitter, bitter cup which had been her portion, had that morning overflowed.

In a remote village, far removed from all her old connexions,—a place to which in her shame and desolation she had wandered, under the lowly roof of a cottage somewhat above the ordinary

sort, where she had taken refuge, she had given birth to her poor, disowned, and friendless baby. It might be about ten days ago.—And this very morning she had accidentally laid hold of an old newspaper, brought up to her room as wrapper to a parcel. She had carelessly glanced over its contents—but a name had suddenly arrested her attention.

It was that of Ridley!

Her eyes starting from their sockets—her nerves yet delicate and disordered—her pulses hurrying with a rapidity that mocks description, she had read the paragraph before her.

It was the splendid description, in all its details, of the marriage of the man she had loved—of the marriage with another of the man, the father of her son—the father of that baby who lay slumbering in his dreamy dawn of life upon the pillow before her.

She read the article with hurried and impassioned vehemence; she read it again, and again, and again. There seemed a greediness of misery, an unnatural gluttony of the heart, which fastened with a ravenous satisfaction upon the incidents of her despair.

She read of the beautiful bridesmaids and more lovely bride—the names of the aristocratic assemblage which honoured the splendid breakfast with



their presence—of the various delicacies with which the table was loaded, and the many toasts that were drunk. She read of equipages and processions—of girls in white strewing flowers—footmen with bouquets and favours; in brief, of all the pomp, pride, and circumstance of a most splendid, nay, ostentatious wedding.

And after she had read it over, and over, and over again, she had cast her eyes round the little room, had caught up a bonnet and shawl, seized upon her infant, huddled it in its little blanket, and with her temples beating, her brain burning, her eyes dry as hot coals, her body shaking and trembling, but filled with a fierce unnatural strength, had rushed down stairs, crossed a little garden at the back of the house, and got out into the fields behind.

She was making her way to some pond or river.

The only idea which seemed to present itself to her confused, hurried, darkened mind, appeared to be that of ending her misery, and of the infant born only for misery, at once, by seeking refuge in the cool, cool bosom of some peaceful, slumbering waters, which should bury her in their dark crystal waves, and close in oblivion this heart-rending story.

Her cup had long been filling,—slowly, slowly

filling, and surging to the brim — it overflowed, and all was ended.

She had neither hope nor tie upon earth. And, alas! in her agony of despair it was no time to begin to look beyond. Her limited horizon presented only one scene of hopeless, impenetrable darkness — not one single ray of light gleamed in the far distance,—all, all was utterly desolate and bare.

There was a vision,—a sort of luring phantom before her of some dark pool, shaded with trees, lonely, still, and deep,—of a picture she had once seen by Ruysdael.

To escape from all this misery, to sink with her child into the bosom of such dark and silent waters, was the only purpose her mind seemed capable of forming.

She hurried on, crossing fields, and roads, and paths, but so impetuously rushing forwards that she never looked round; no such dark and silent water presented itself, overhung with sheltering trees, wherein to plunge and bury herself for ever; but the rain pelted overhead, and her long, dark hair, which had escaped from her bonnet, hung wet and limp in long streamers round her, as she wildly struggled on, with her child yet warm and sleeping upon her bosom.

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The same day there was another and a very different scene going on.

One of the world's sharp contrasts.

There was another wedding feast, in a large country-house, in a remote part of England, being celebrated.

Lucilla Mordaunt—the young, beautiful, lively, Lucilla Mordaunt—was married that day to Mr. Chandos, and the whole family of Mordaunt Hall were assembled together upon the occasion. Lucilla was the youngest of five sisters, the daughters of Mr. Mordaunt, and all but one celebrated the county round for their beauty, gaiety, and accomplishments. The *belles* of every ball, the toasts of every dinner, the adored, in truth or in the spirit of fashion and imitation, of every young man in the county. Some came to sigh for their beauty in the sincerity of honest feeling. Some to give themselves consequence by enrolling themselves amid the list of their admirers. Some because they were of an ancient and honourable family. Some for this reason, some for that—but reasons enough there were for wooing the Miss Mordaunts, of Mordaunt Hall, and many were the wooers and difficult the choice. The three eldest Miss Mordaunts had, however,

already made their selection, and were all married to men of good standing and fortune, infinitely to their parents' satisfaction, and it was now the fair Lucilla's turn.

Lucilla, the fairest where so many were fair.

Wilful and arrogant this youngest flower of this favoured house had been—wilful, capricious, saucy—as the spoiled youngest and the loveliest of all.

Beautiful beyond description—or at least beyond what I shall attempt to describe—fantastic, airy, gay, and wild, Mr. Chandos had fallen deeply, blindly in love with her.

It is really provoking—very provoking—to see men possessing every quality that can dignify, ennoble, or give true value to human nature, just as much the slaves of a pretty face, as if they were the emptiest coxcombs that ever flirted at a ball.

Few things in the constitution of our worldly affairs vex and perplex one more than this devotion to beauty; but it is vain to complain of it; the laws that regulate the kingdom of love are not to be called to account—to their imperious tyranny we are obliged to bow the head and submit—will he, nill he.

It would have cost me much, had I been his friend, to submit with tolerable patience to the incomprehensible power which subjugated Mr.

Chandos to the tyranny of Lucilla Mordaunt. Perhaps it was that poet's soul of his—that deep, devoted love of beauty in all its forms—which not only worshipped this sweetest face and form with a too fond idolatry, but which, under the influence of the most generous and tender of passions, lent colours, drawn from his own fervid imagination alone, to this young divinity,—before whom he so blindly fell down and worshipped—worshipping, like other idolaters, his own creation. I know not—and I waste words to attempt to account for a fact, such as falls within our experience every day, but which, fall when it will, we cannot help regarding as a fresh unaccountable wonder. Certain it is, in this case, that the hackneyed expression, “he was dying of love” for Lucilla Mordaunt, would hardly have been too strong as applied to Charles Chandos.

What he suffered under the vicissitudes of his passion—from the wayward caprices of his mistress's humour, the emotions of her pride, and the indifference of her heart—you may imagine, when I tell you, that under all that gay carelessness of manner, which lent so much charm to her beauty, Lucilla was careless—yet not without a regard to interest—capricious, and vain.

The death of his elder brother did more for Mr. Chandos than all his fine understanding,

his noble heart, his sweet temper, his high spirit, or his charming face and manners, could have done.

In a decent time after this event Lucilla yielded, and the long servitude of Mr. Chandos was at an end.

A servitude that seemed to him but of so many days, so great was his love for her.

But I doubt whether Charles Chandos could have endured this long course of suffering—for very long it had been—but for the support and assistance of one gentle friend.

Kind, patient, “gentle as the brooding dove, when that her golden couplets are disclosed”—quiet, silent, shunning observation, shrouding herself, as the nightingale in the brake, when she pours forth her sweetest, tenderest melody—with soft blue eyes, clouded by a soft darkening of melancholy, yet filled with compassion and love—with pale, delicate cheek, upon which the lines of ineffaceable suffering were traced—with voice low and soft, that most excellent thing in woman—always wrapped in a kind of invalid dress, which concealed the mischiefs which disease had wrought upon a too tender frame—with hand white and delicate as snow—with foot that seemed to steal along rather than to tread the floor.

Such was one figure that might be seen at times occupying a place at Mordaunt Hall, a foil to all those brilliant beauties, glowing in all the gifts of health, high spirits, and unimpaired prosperity. The pale evening sinking into twilight after the rich glow of a summer's day—the soft moonlight resting upon the tufted trees, and casting its deep, holy shadows upon the grass—the star of evening, dim with tears, when all the heavenly host is glittering over the sky. Such were the confused, indistinct images with which the imagination of Chandos clothed the pale and spiritual vision—this tender appearance, which formed so sweet a contrast to the gay groups of Mordaunt Hall.

In describing which, a contrast of another kind must not be forgotten, in the serene aspect of the beautiful and noble mother; that fair, large, dignified woman, with the clear, serene blue eye, an air of wifely, motherly, womanly, and gentlewomanly, true dignity. The calm and temperate, the wise, the firm, the religious, and the good.

Was it possible that this calm and fair woman could be the mother of these blooming maidens, so unlike her in every thing but her matchless beauty? Even in that they differed, for their cheeks were glowing with the hues of bursting

roses, with hair hanging in rich nut-brown curls, and with eyes of nut-brown hue ; and if she was tall and fully formed,—as a noble mother of the gods is imaged in pale yet living marble,—they were slight and tall, buoyant and animated,—like the Graces of Venus, I might have said, only they were something over-animated for Graces, so I may as well leave them without a parallel.

This serene and moonlight mother, and this soft, and fragile, and dewy-starred daughter, were, as by this somewhat affected phrase I am endeavouring to express, like the fair large moon when she rises in her calm beauty upon this world, and the faint pale star which may be seen dimly attending upon her path.

Calantha Mordaunt was the mortal name of this pale star.

When Charles Chandos first appeared at Mordaunt Hall, he had done as, in a large family, many young men of delicacy and feeling are apt to do, but which it is a great pity, and sometimes a serious mischief when they do do. In that shyness, susceptibility, and self-distrust, which attends upon a passion so sincere and devoted as his, he had rather shunned than sought the object of his adoration. His voice faltering and stammering, his manner agitated and constrained,



when he spoke to her, he had loved rather to watch her from a distance, and delight his eyes in a too impassioned gazing, than directly to address her, and he had sought a refuge for his uneasiness in the society and friendship of one whose kindness and friendship were never found wanting—nay, under a common delusion, he found he was making way with one sister, as, his heart full of her image, he devoted his time and conversation to another.

He looked at Lucilla, but he talked with Calantha. And if he followed Lucilla with his eyes while he did so, every one looked at and admired *her*, for she was but just come out, and that she should be the general object of attention was a matter of course.

His conversation was a delightful enjoyment to the unfortunate Calantha; and it may be feared that it was a cruel addition to the trials of this incomparable young creature, made perfect through much suffering—victim from her birth to a cruel malady—racked by frequent and severe pain, and whose helpless, melancholy childhood had been succeeded by a too helpless and suffering a youth to be exposed to its fascination.

From love she had till now been happily altogether shielded by her sense of her own unfortunate condition, aided by the general neglect

she met with when in company with her attractive sisters.

But now a new era began. Charles Chandos found in Calantha one that sympathised in every high aspiration, and entered into every tender feeling, and he delighted in her society. She was the sister of the idol he worshipped in secret, and he loved her with a brother's affection. It was some time before the confession of the true state of his heart was made, and certainly time enough had elapsed for feelings to arise upon the part of the sweet Calantha, which never could have found birth had she from the first suspected the existence of this passion for another.

How it went with her when that discovery at last was made no one knew.

Reserved, gentle, tender, as were her voice and manner, if the light of those soft eyes was brighter, if that sweet melancholy smile was sweeter still, if that soft voice was more soft when Charles Chandos sat by and talked with her, the indications were far too delicate to attract the observation of the common observer. And though her good-humoured sisters laughed, and bantered, and vowed that Charles Chandos, who was too poor ever to think of marrying, was half in love with her, and rallied her upon his

devoted friendship, if a faint colour, faint as the pink upon the pearl, would just rise to her cheek, and her eyelids would drop a little as they said so, the idea of love and Calantha was so entirely apart, and the possibility of her ever marrying considered in the family so totally out of the question, that these faint signals were entirely overlooked except by the watchful mother. She felt some anxious doubts at times arising, doubts which she did not dare to satisfy by the remotest allusion to the subject. She feared to awaken feelings, perhaps yet dormant, by sympathy—for she knew the power which a conviction of irremediable impossibility exercises over love—and she trusted that her Calantha's tranquillity, if the secret were undiscovered by herself, might yet remain undisturbed.

At length, as said above, the elder brother died, Charles Chandos became a man of large estate, he declared his passion, and was accepted.

As the tender leaves of a delicate flower close upon itself when the chill of the evening comes on,—if true it were that they *had* expanded to the touch of love, so closed the heart of Calantha.

That the secret was her own, that no one suspected, and that no one pitied her, that she could retire within the chambers of her soul un-

heeded by any, and lay her humble submission at the feet of her Saviour and Creator, was a very great consolation.

Before those sacred and reverend feet, how many a humble offering of patience, resignation, and unquestioning submission, had already by her been laid ! If this was a more difficult sacrifice than all the rest, no one knew it. She maintained the same gentle tranquillity of appearance, was the same serene, uncomplaining sufferer, the same kind adviser and sympathiser when others suffered, as she had ever been.

Her mother alone watched her closely—her mother divined what was passing within—her mother, high-hearted, enthusiastic, susceptible of all that was generous and good, read, in a slight shade of tenderer melancholy, in a slight modulation of a voice still softer and lower than ever, and in an almost imperceptible increase in the usual stillness of her manner, the truth of this affecting story—but, true to her principles, she said nothing.

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A wedding-day in her family had always been, in spite of its joyous demonstrations, a day of

seriousness to Mrs. Mordaunt. The mother's heart clung to the unfortunate child ; she could not upon these occasions help lamenting with peculiar bitterness the fate of one cut off from the natural happiness of her sex. No family, no children, no devoted bridegroom, for her ! But this last wedding-day these things had been felt with more peculiar force—this was the last of her sisters, and now Calantha would be left alone.

The carriages, one by one, drew up to the hall steps ; party after party of the gaily-dressed visitors had taken leave, for the bride and bridegroom had been gone hours ago. The married sisters had been the last of the company to set out ; but they, after a late family dinner, had also departed, and the diminished family were left to themselves.

It rained hard now, though the morning had been fine for the season of the year, and the wind rushed into the hall as they all stood there together, bidding farewell to the last who went away.

The butler at last closed the door, locked and double-locked it for the night ; and began to busy himself with putting out lamps and candles and restoring order after the confusion of the day. The mother turned round, took Calantha in her arms, pressed her tenderly to her mother's

bosom, kissed her twice upon the forehead, and then saying cheerfully, "Come, let us go and get your father some tea," passed into the deserted dining-room.

Mr. Mordaunt, a rather florid, handsome, gentlemanlike man, was already there, standing over the fire, rubbing his hands, and rejoicing that the day was over. He hated trouble, though he did not, perhaps, dislike display, and was far from insensible to the pride and pleasure of seeing his petted little one, his darling Lucilla, who he always prophesied would prove the beauty of the family, married to the finest young man, possessing one of the first estates in the country. But he now was quite ready for his tea and the newspaper, which in the bustle of the morning had remained unopened.

It was a treat to compensate for a day of less agreeable bustle, to have tea, quiet, a good fire within, and pelting rain and whistling wind without, all crowned by the delight of an unopened newspaper.

Mrs. Mordaunt made tea, for Calantha was evidently so much exhausted that the least exertion was out of the question; so the kind mother helped the suffering daughter to her comfortable chair, and saying, "I am afraid I shall make but a bad hand of it," began to open her tea-chest

and prepare to take her younger daughter's place at the tea-table; while Calantha, whose spirits were quite exhausted, and to whom the exhaustion of over-fatigue was a real and great suffering, sank into a chair by the side of the fire.

She was feeling very, very desolate. How silent and deserted the house seemed! Her sisters were at last all gone, and she was left alone with her parents. All her kind cares and exertions,—for she had been the friend, the adviser, the good genius, as it were, of them all,—were at an end, and the future looked blank and objectless. Her parents, still in the vigour of health and intellect, in the full flush of unblighted prosperity, and surrounded with all the means of happiness and comfort afforded by a plentiful fortune, called little for either sympathy or assistance; but all young people have abundance of troubles, even under the most favourable circumstances, and a sympathising friend and *confidante* is ever needed. That part it had been Calantha's to play, almost from her childhood, for her understanding had been singularly ripe for her years; and these exertions had afforded an interest to her life, and happily occupied her strenuous and loving nature: but as regarded her mother, she had herself been accustomed to look up

to her for support and comfort ; she had never been called upon in that case to minister either. The delicacy of her health forbade her to assist her by assuming any part in the management of the household ; and as far as moral wants were concerned, it had been for the wise, calm, and well-tempered character of the mother to afford support to, not demand it from, her children. They had never been called upon, as many daughters are, to assist in the support of failing courage or declining spirits. Calantha loved her mother almost to adoration, equally from a sense of her many excellences, and the deep, ineffaceable gratitude inspired by her boundless kindness to herself : but she wanted somebody to do something for.

Her spirit was so active, though her frame was rendered helpless by disease, that to want an object was as a sort of death to her ; her energetic mind seemed imperatively to demand this most necessary aliment to sustain its powers.

She was not repining — she never repined. As she sat, sunk there in her chair, musing with her eyes fixed upon the object before her, she was not even questioning — she had long ceased to question — but she felt low, and now as she sat there gazing upon a beautiful landscape by Rubens, which hung opposite, — the subject was a



wide, extended, almost boundless, landscape, such as that master knew so well how to represent, — Calantha thought of the limitless world without, into which her sisters were launched, and the narrow, confined world within which she was doomed to dwell.

Her sensations were probably very much such as we may imagine would be those of a thoughtful, earnest character like hers, the evening upon which the black veil had been assumed, and the life of the active, everyday world finally ended.

A sense of vacuity, of sameness, of blankness, a want of wholesome object, of wholesome interest — resignation and submission to the will of God remain; but the Almighty has not constituted His creatures in the spring of youth and first glow of existence to subsist upon resignation and submission, that should be the nourishment of the aged or the helpless.

To Calantha, at that moment, it seemed as if the very means of life, what would have been to the body as air and food, were wanting to her earnest spirit.

Her mother, from the tea-table, watched her as she sat there unconsciously lost in this deep reverie, and the grave expression of her pallid face, over which insensibly a still, and a

still deeper and darker character of melancholy was stealing. She turned away and sighed—a smothered sigh it was. She would not for worlds have assisted by her sympathy to excite such thoughts and feelings as she felt persuaded at this moment possessed her hapless daughter.

The storm had now abated, and the rain no longer beat against the window. The wind, which had howled so mournfully round the house, was still. It was getting late, but they still sat there. The mother had drawn her chair to the fire, had taken her daughter's hand, and an affectionate pressure had been exchanged between them. Then Calantha raised her tender, gentle eyes to her mother's and smiled,—that sweet, patient, encouraging smile, which had so often carried comfort to the mother's heart, and she tried to talk cheerfully of what had passed; but it would not quite do, they all insensibly relapsed into silence again. Mr. Mordaunt dozed in his chair, the mother sat mute and abstracted, the daughter had fallen back, looking very weary.

The clock struck twelve.

Mrs. Mordaunt started up at the sound of the clock, and, declaring she had no idea it was so

late, and that they should all be better in bed, had just summoned the butler to put out the lamps and bring the bed candles, when the bell at the hall door was suddenly heard to ring— sudden, loud, sharp, short, as if pulled by a hasty hand.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“Hadst thou thy wits and did persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.”

*Hamlet.*

DRIVEN forward by the demon of despair, the unhappy Miriam had hurried on, the frenzy which possessed her giving a strength quite beyond nature. She felt no feebleness, no weariness, but dashing on through desolate and secluded fields, went straight forwards, as I said, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.

The rain poured in torrents down; but she held on her way. Her bonnet had fallen off, and her long hair fell, drenched with the water which was pouring from the skies, and which ran in streams from every lock that hung upon her shoulders. Beautiful, most beautiful, poor, ruined

creature she was, in this the death agony of the soul, in this passion of madness which had seized her !

She went, I know not how far, over bare and lonely hills, which foot of man rarely trod,—through lonely pastures and through silent groves. The rain pelting pitilessly upon her bare head—insensible to every object, beckoned forward, as it were, by that vision of the dark and sleeping pool, crowned with pendent alders and willows, and covered with white water-lilies.

At last she reached a very thick and extensive wood.

She entered it and struggled through the tangled branches and briers ; and torn by the thorns, her feet lacerated and bleeding, till she came to the foot of a gentle hill, covered by a swelling grassy lawn, and crowned by a white stone house of stately appearance.

It was by this time night, the wind had lulled, and the moon had risen—a full, bright moon it was ; wading through the clouds, its beams fell bright upon the front of the mansion.

The glittering white front seemed to attract her attention for a moment. She looked up, but then turning suddenly away, rushed once more into the thicket. The waters of a lonely pool, gleaming in the moonbeams, in the midst of some

dark trees, had caught her eye. Like some magnetic attraction, it acted upon her imagination, and she was hurrying towards it, when the feeble wail of her infant caught her ear.

The rain which had fallen unceasingly upon her head, had served in some degree to cool the burning frenzy with which every pulse was beating. The little one had found its way to her breast, and had sucked and sucked itself quiet again unperceived ; but now it half awoke again, and uttered a little low wail, and she opened the blanket in which it was wrapped, and looked down upon it in a wild, impassioned manner. The infant half opened its large and dreamy eyes, its little hand, moulded upon that of its wretched father, clasped a finger, its plaintive wailings smote upon her heart ; she stopped and stood still.

It looked, she thought, at that instant, so like its father as there it lay, that with a strange and sudden alteration of feeling, the impulse to claim it as her own, unite its fate with hers, and bury it, clinging to her bosom, in the waters, ceased.

She looked at it till she thought it scarcely belonged to herself, and an unnatural sense of strangeness, almost alienation, came over her. This alienation of the moment saved the innocent

creature's life. She was beginning to recover her recollection in some degree, though still unnaturally and dreadfully excited ; she stopped, and as the wants of the infant became exchanged for the loud cries of hunger, she hushed and soothed it, and allowed it to hang again at her breast.

As the infant sucked, the brain of the mother became more and more lucid, though still, in poor Cordelia's phrase, "far wide."

The determination to bury herself in the waters remained unaltered—the one fixed idea present to her mind ; but the craving thus to rescue the child from a world so full of sin and misery once abated, the feeling of close intimate union of existence once destroyed—the image of Ridley once intruded, the whole chain of her excited ideas was broken. She felt severed from this being—a horror succeeded to the passionate paroxysm of love which had devoted him to share her fate. She looked upon the little helpless being thus clinging to her for life, and she could not destroy him.

And now the wind rose, and then it lulled again ; the inky clouds again rolled slowly over the moon, and the darkness once more fell upon the lawn, but the house remained, still dimly visible.

There was a sort of method in her proceedings, though still in a hurried delirium.

Round her neck there hung, suspended by a black riband, two little golden hearts, one given to her by Ridley in the days of his passion—it contained his own hair;—the other, she had begged of him to procure for her, and had put in it some hair of her father's. This last heart had the initials H. F. upon it; the other was without initials, but a very minute star was in the centre.

There had been much fond nonsense at the time talked between them about that star: it was to be the pole-star of her destiny—the load-star of his heart. I know not—it matters not why—but she could never persuade herself to part with it. She had, however, in one of her paroxysms of indignation and despair, thrown away the light gold chain, by which he had fastened it upon her arm, and had hung both the little relics round her neck by a narrow black riband.

This she now took off, and threw it round the infant's neck; then she soothed him to sleep, sitting rocking him in her arms under a spreading oak-tree that stretched its huge branches into the night, and sheltered her from observation: the infant asleep, she rose, and still skirting the



wood, and shrubberies, and hidden by their deep shadows, she had reached the hall-door of that white, gleaming, stone mansion.

She laid down the sleeping child upon the steps, and hastened away, and hid herself under the thick branches of a beech-tree which fell to the grass.

No one was heard to approach.

Then she hurried again to the door, caught up her child, kissed, and hugged it to her bosom, shedding, however, not one single tear; then she uncovered its face, and looked at it with a return of natural feeling, and all a mother's agony of love; then fresh recollection of that strong likeness seemed to start upon her heart. She hurried once more to the steps, deposited her burden there, pulled the bell with a strong, determined hand, and darting away, was lost to sight in the dark shadows of the trees.

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The black deep sleeping pool was furrowed by a few circling waves; the moon, with a shadowy, spectral light, gleamed upon the bosom of the white water-lilies.

The yielding element closed over the miserable

one; and so ended the tale of the once beautiful, gifted, happy, and innocent Miriam.

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There is many a newspaper story unheedingly read of—to use the words of a fine modern poet—

“ A wintry river, broad and black,  
That through dark archways glides along,  
Ranged where the gaslights on it play,  
With coiling eddies swirling strong,  
That far below the dizzy height  
Of the dark bridge swim through the night,—  
A crouching form, that through the gloom  
Paces its stones a hundred times,  
That pausing, glancing keenly round  
The dark high balustrade upelims—  
A plunge—a shriek !”

BENNETT.

The dark bosom of the Thames has received many and many a victim of man's perfidy and woman's frailty.

Oh, that this melancholy tale might awaken remorse and repentance in those who have thus greatly offended; and serve as a warning to those still in all the dangerous heedlessness of youth who are as yet innocent of the great transgression.

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“ When all was wrapped in dark midnight,  
And all was fast asleep,  
In glided Margaret’s grimly ghost,  
And stood at William’s feet ;  
Her face was like the April moon,  
Clad in a wintry cloud,  
And clay-cold was the lily hand  
Which held the sable shroud.”

He never loved to have the shutters of his large, lofty bedchamber closed — he was a feverish and restless sleeper. Often he scarcely slept at all, but rested in a drowsy, half-sleeping, half-waking state, when he seemed to himself to be quite awake, and could have asserted that he never had once closed his eyes, though, when startled from it by some sudden noise, he perceived that he had not been awake.

He often lay thus now.

The rich crimson velvet curtains of the almost royal bed in which he lay were open, and so were those of the large distant window at the foot — that is, they were partly unclosed, so as to admit a stream of light into the room, for the pale moon shone against the window.

The rain had beaten, and the wind had whistled loud. The night had been noisy and dreary; but now the wind had lulled, heavy, funereal clouds drove lazily over the sky, and the moon gleamed with her wizard light between.

His bride slumbered by his side ; but he was become almost a stranger to sleep ;—he had murdered sleep.

Do what he would, the recollection of that mild, gentle old man, lashed to a wild fury in the cause of his daughter,—the image of Miriam, as he had last seen her, when he turned back, and beheld her fallen to the earth, suffocating with the suppressed sobbings of her despair ; such images would come.

The pillow is a fearful reckoner with man. In the half delirium of his wakeful nights these images were often frightfully vivid.

So he lay that night in this visionary state ; his eyes fixed upon that gleam of moonlight which fell into the chamber ; his thoughts filled with a dreamy succession of painful pictures of the past, slowly following each other in melancholy procession. More brightly than ever did a too faithful memory represent her, now in the bloom of her energy and beauty, now in the agony of her tenderness, and now in the last parting scene of her despair. He saw her so distinctly there before him at the moment that he might almost have thought the image a reality, had it not been followed by one more vivid still.

As he lay gazing in this strange, doubtful mood into the moonlight, he thought it began slowly to

condense, as it were, into a brighter and more substantial light and shadow,—to assume, by lingering degrees, the similitude of a form.

Was it a form or a fancy? Could it be surely a real form?

Clothed in long white garments, her dark hair in long braided tresses hanging down around her face and shoulders, dripping with water, which streamed from hair and vesture; her face pale as the water-lily; her long black eyelashes and eyebrows shading her faded cheek, with head bowed down, and hands crossed over her breast, supporting a small tender infant; there she stood, visible as reality.

He tried to rouse himself—to start up—to gaze—to cry out her name—but, as if spell-bound, there he lay, bound as it were by some iron power to his pillow—his eyes staring—his hair on end—the cold sweat bathing his limbs and brows.

There she stood immovable in the moonbeam, her eyes bent down upon her baby, with that air so infinitely sad, that tears would have streamed from all who had beheld—and yet he shed no tear.

Does the shadowy form move?—Gently, as if with a floating, swimming motion, it approaches the foot of the bed—the dark eyelashes are

raised — the pale waxen lids lifted — the large dark eyes — eyes that were like the purple violets in their beauty — fixed in one long, intense, solemn gaze upon him.

Her folded arms unclosed — the infant, clothed in shining white, is once, twice, thrice, pressed to the beautiful bosom — the head drooping, as of a flower dying upon its stem, bends over it — one kiss upon its lips — one solemn, earnest look from those starry, deathless eyes. She gently lays the child at the father's feet; and the beams of the moon between the heavy velvet curtains shine down in their lucid clearness again.

He felt the pressure of the cold deathly hands, — ice, as it were, to his very heart of hearts, as the baby was deposited at his feet. He was certain, as of any fact he ever had experienced, that he felt the actual weight and pressure of those clay-cold hands.

A few seconds, and he seemed involved in a strange confusion and darkness.

Then he awoke his slumbering bride by the violence of an ague-fit, which shook the bed.

To her hurried inquiries, as she sprang up, threw on her *manteau de nuit*, and asked what was the matter, in a very terrified tone, he strove to answer with composure; but he was shaking from head to foot; his face was pale — was blue — his

eyes wild and meaningless — he suddenly rose up and looked in a searching, hurried way, to the foot of the bed.

Then, with a suppressed “Ah!” sank back again, shivering all the time.

“Let me ring! — what’s the matter? — how horribly you frighten me! — good heavens, what can it be? — let me ring?”

But he laid his hand upon her arm.

She tried to keep it off; it was as the icy hand of death. She almost shrieked at the excess of cold.

He tried to speak; but for some time he could not articulate; he kept pointing and fixing his eyes upon the foot of the bed.

“Do you see nothing there?” at last he broke out — “nothing — nothing there?”

“Where? — there! — oh, only the white folds of my lace shawl huddled together,” said she, taking it up. “How careless of Lydia to leave it there!”

He turned away, and saying, “I shall be better now — pray don’t disturb yourself or any one — I am very sorry to have alarmed you” — closed his eyes, and appeared inclined to sleep.

She was sleepy and drowsy, and not troubled with much sensibility as to the sufferings of others; and was glad enough to obey him.

He was extremely ill for several weeks after this; the medical man called in apprehended a brain fever. The young bride was first excessively vexed, and then a good deal frightened; and then, as he grew better, vexed; and, at last, deeply offended and mortified; for the profound melancholy into which he sank, when recovering from his first day's extreme illness, was strangely inconsistent with the position of one newly married to one of the greatest heiresses and most beautiful women in England.

But it seemed impossible for him to recover his spirits. The medical men were quite unable to account for this profound melancholy; it was not like a melancholy proceeding from actual distress of mind, far less from positive disease of body—with either of these they might have dealt; it shewed itself in no complainings, in none of those various forms by which an attack of hypochondria is usually detected. A profound, unchangeable gravity of aspect, gloomy eyes, and the most invincible indifference, nay, distaste for every external object, were the chief symptoms.

His fair bride could not be persuaded to regard



this — as vainly the doctors endeavoured to persuade her to do — as the mere effect of some obscure malady. She resented it deeply and bitterly. She could not believe but that, if Ridley loved her as he ought, her presence and such proofs of affection as her pride permitted her to give would have more than sufficed to arouse him from this dreary apathy, “to awake a soul even from under the ribs of death!”

She could not forgive it.

Perhaps all might yet have been right between them; but as time wore away, and his melancholy gradually was dissipated, till he became much as other not very cheerful men are, there was no return of his old devotion to herself; the adored mistress, the adulated bride, found herself reduced to the condition of the mere wife, without any of those gradual changes of the feelings which render the mutation natural and tolerable.

He treated her with the respect and observance due to her beauty and station, nay, to her galled feelings it seemed as if he almost disdainfully exaggerated upon these things; but one word of true tenderness, one look of genuine passion, never blessed her more.

Disappointed and offended, she withdrew from him a heart, which a love, such as she had once

borne him, might have warmed to better things. Her feelings, as they first began to expand, thus blighted in the bud, the egotism and the coldness of her former character returned, and she became soon a mere selfish wife of fashion to the man absorbed in politics and ambition.

## CHAPTER XV.

“Within its cage the imprison’d matin bird  
Swells the full chorus with a generous song :  
He bathes no pinion in the dewy light,  
No consort’s bliss, no father’s joy he shares ;  
Yet still the rising radiance glads his sight,  
His fellows’ freedom soothes the captive’s cares.”

COLERIDGE, *Sonnet to La Fayette*.

THE clock struck twelve.

—“Mrs. Mordaunt started at the sound, and declaring she had no idea it was so late, and that they should all be the better for bed, proposed to summon the butler to put out the lamps and light the bed-candles, when the bell at the hall-door was suddenly heard to ring loud, sharp, and short, as if pulled by a hasty hand.”—

“Who can it possibly be at this time of night?” cried Mrs. Mordaunt, startled and nervous more than her wont. There was a sort of evil foreboding oppressing her that evening—a gloom for which she could not account; it was so much

deeper than what was natural to a conjuncture not usually favourable to high spirits.

She really was quite nervous and excited; and the sharp, loud ring, sounded to her in a strange, alarming manner: it seemed like a summons of evil.

“What can be the matter? Who can possibly be ringing at the bell at this time of night?”

The butler was heard to open the door, but all was silent; the door closed again, and no fresh steps were heard.

“Who is come in? What can it be?” said Mrs. Mordaunt, looking at her daughter. Mr. Mordaunt was fast asleep in his arm-chair. “It was such a loud, *passionate* sort of ring!”

Calantha sat listening; at last she said,—

“No one came in. Shall I ring the bell, mamma, and ask Williams? How very odd!”

The drawing-room bell was rung, and Williams appeared.

“Who rang at the hall-bell?” asked his mistress. “Very strange, Williams, that you did not come to tell us what it was!”

“I don’t know, madam. I beg your pardon. I thought perhaps it was a mistake of mine. There was nobody at the door. The bell was rung, to my mind, as if the wire would be broken, and I made all haste to answer it, think-

ing there must be some hasty news. It's been a rough, wild day without, and we have been all of us I don't know how after this wedding. I made haste to the door, but there was not a creature to be seen; and the night was cold, so I shut it again directly. I hoped you hadn't heard the bell, or Miss Calantha——"

"Yes, Williams, we heard the bell — there is no doubt of that; and it seemed as if it was pulled by some one either in much haste or much distress."

"I don't think as how it was a living hand as pulled it," said Williams.

"Dear mamma," said Calantha, now speaking with much earnestness, and raising herself in her chair, "the bell certainly was pulled — somebody in terror or distress, perhaps ill, who knows? Dear, good Williams, do open the door again, and let somebody go out and make a search round and call. Some creature in agony rang that bell."

The old man stood still, and said nothing; but his hand still held the lock of the door, as if unwilling and irresolute.

Mrs. Mordaunt said, —

"You are right, Calantha. Pray, Williams, go out and look round: somebody must, you know, of course be there, and something is the matter."

But Williams hesitated.

“Why don’t you go,” asked his mistress, “when I desire you?”

“The bell does not ring again, and nobody *was* there. If it had been any body, they would soon have rung again,” said the old servant.

“One would think so, certainly,” replied his mistress; “but it is very strange. Hush—listen!”

“Nothing, madam, but the wind, though the storm has fallen. It moans in a strange, sad, mournful way like to-night; I could fancy I heard it lamenting,” said the old man, “and have been fancying it all the evening.”

“Do, for heaven’s sake, then, go out and see what it is!” cried Calantha, now rising in her earnestness with less pain and difficulty than usual; “lamenting, you say? Somebody is in distress, and in this fearful night!” And she took up the stick she used to help her steps with, and began to move towards the door.

“Nay, my dear Calantha, you will catch cold!” interposed her mother. “Williams will go. Tell Thomas to go with you, and make a search round. Nay, Calantha, do sit down again!”

“Dear mamma, do let me go to the door, pray, pray!” putting her hand gently aside, and whispering, “Poor Williams is frightened out of his

wits, and Thomas will be as bad, or worse. The bell *could* not have been rung without hands. Do let me just go to the door. Come, Williams — you won't be afraid to open the door for me! Suppose it should be some one in distress, Williams, so late at night, and we had shut the door upon them, what would your good, kind heart say to you to-morrow morning, Williams? One has heard of such stories, you know."

And, thus talking, she kept moving to the door; and poor Williams, rather ashamed than convinced, followed her.

He undid the door, and they looked out.

Most certainly there was no one to be seen.

The moonbeams fell obliquely upon the portico, and the large stone pillars cast their heavy shadows upon the stones. One side was almost totally in darkness.

The wind heaved in the branches of the surrounding trees, but the storm had subsided — the clouds, like the retreating forces of a broken army, were slowly clearing away, and the low murmur of the sinking blast was heard over the distant woods. There was a something spectral and unearthly in the appearance of the night, and even Calantha felt a shuddering kind of doubt and terror creeping over her as she looked

round and perceived that there was certainly no one to be found.

“ Call, Williams ! ” she said.

And she called herself—for the old servant would not or could not.

“ Is any one there ? Who rang ? Is any one there ? ”

Mrs. Mordaunt now appeared with the footman whom she had summoned ; and, strengthened in his courage by the presence of numbers, he ventured forth into the portico, and, raising his voice, vociferated, in imitation of his young mistress,—

“ Holloa !—holloa ! Who rang ? Is there any one there ? ”

The voice of the footman did what the soft tones of Calantha had failed to do.

They listened, and were answered by the wild, vehement cry of a very little infant, suddenly awakened.

“ Good God !—good God ! what is that ? ” cried mother and daughter at once, rushing into the portico.

Directed by the sound, lying hidden under the deep shadow of the thick stone pillars, at the foot of which it had been laid, they found the poor little deserted offspring of guilt and of despair.



The child was wrapped in a baby's blanket of fine flannel, which, as they unrolled it, displayed the infant of ten days old, its little face crimson with the workings of its passion, and crying with the inconceivable power which such helpless beings possess of forcing attention.

It was dressed in a simple white dimity night-gown and plain cambric cap, and round its little neck hung the narrow black riband upon which the two tiny golden hearts were suspended.

Calantha's arms extended eagerly at the sight, as Mrs. Mordaunt and the footman together stooped down and lifted up the small bundle from the foot of the pillar. Her mother placed the little helpless being in those kind, sheltering arms; and, telling her daughter to go in and take the poor little thing to the fire, hurried out, accompanied by the footman, into the night.

They searched long amid the shrubberies and the neighbouring woods and walks—it is needless to say, in vain. No vestige was to be discovered of that hand which had pulled the bell with so much passionate vehemence.

A mother's hand it alone could be; of this Mrs. Mordaunt's mother's heart made her certain. But where had the wretched mother vanished, whose misery or shame (what else?) had con-

strained her to this unnatural step? Where was she gone in her despair?

It was nearly two hours before this good and spirited woman abandoned the search, and, returning to the house, found her daughter still sitting by the drawing-room fire, holding the infant in her lap.

The screams of the child had proceeded from terror at being suddenly awakened, and not from hunger; and, too young yet to be sensible to any external impressions but those of sound and appetite, it had fallen asleep again under the gentle lulling of the new and most tender hands into which it had fallen.

She sat there, holding the infant in her arms, now and then listening to the voices, more and more distant, engaged in the search out of doors — now and then looking down upon the sleeping child, upon its tiny hands, so beautifully formed, its little embryo features, which the repose of sleep made almost beautiful — upon its white dimity dress, so plain and yet so delicate — upon the black riband hanging round its neck — and upon the two small hearts, one enclosing a small lock of hair inclining to grey, the other black as the raven's wing. Her thoughts were confused and agitated; yet a feeling of the most exciting

interest succeeded, not unpleasantly, to the gloom in which she had passed the evening.

She was meditative—far above her years, and reflective, as it was natural she should be; and as she sat there she compared the fate of this being, doomed to desertion and apparent misery from his cradle, and her own melancholy fate; and a sympathy seemed already to arise between them;—she, poor outcast from all the joys of nature, marked by the hand of the Almighty for suffering and exclusion from even the common every-day happiness which was the portion of all beside; and he, cast friendless and alone, a miserable, helpless being, upon the wide world, stripped of his share in the commonest and vulgar relations and affections, which seemed the inheritance of every one on earth beside.

And as she thought of these things, she bent down and pressed her lips upon the little red hand fast closed upon itself, but which, gently opening at the soft warmth of her touch, clasped itself round the finger she presented, and then was still again.

It seemed to claim her protection and support, and in that claim to slumber on in peace. So she fancied, and pressed her arm more tenderly round it, and bent her head and gazed with a mother's yearning towards this helpless creature.

So Mrs. Mordaunt found her still sitting as the clock struck two, and she returned wearied and disappointed from her fruitless search. Her first exclamation was,—

“My dearest Calantha, not gone to bed yet?”

“No, dear mamma, how could I? I have been waiting so anxiously for your return, it was impossible to go to bed; and besides, I could not leave this poor little thing. See, it is sweetly asleep, and has fast hold of my finger.”

“Poor creature!” said Mrs. Mordaunt, looking at it compassionately, “it has indeed—poor little thing! What can have become of its unfortunate mother?”

She kept looking at it considering, and speaking her thoughts aloud,—

“The child is dressed, and is no new-born infant abandoned in the first paroxysm of shame and despair; it is a week or more old—this has been done deliberately: and yet that ring was one not of deliberation, but of hasty passion. Yet it must, I think, be some one we know something of, or why lay the poor baby at our door. Have you examined the child’s dress, Calantha? Is there no writing—no paper—no trace of its brief history to be discovered?”

“Only this black riband, and these two small

golden hearts," said Calantha, lifting them up from the baby's frock.

Mrs. Mordaunt examined them carefully.

"H. F.," said she, "upon the one containing the silvered hair—that is an old man's hair. And this very minute star in the centre of the other," continued she, "raven black—that is the betrayer's hair. Poor little wretch! It is the child of shame, Calantha," added she, turning from it with a certain look of repugnance.

But the dove-like eyes of the gentle girl were bent upon it with an expression of unfeigned pity.

She, too, though no child of shame, knew well what shame undeserved was. She knew the deep mortification with which a lot of exception—a lot marked by degradation, though of a different kind, the degradation of nature—tinges the young child's cheek. She knew what it was to be the mark at which unfeeling levity, or barbarous unkindness, could level its shafts; to stand without defence exposed to all the bitter, heart-searing feelings of a humbled child, set apart from its fellows by some irrevocable sentence of nature or of society.

Deeply, deeply, with a sense of burning resentment against injustice, had she, a too sus-

ceptible and fervent child, felt the sufferings entailed upon her personal deformities, and defenceless and helpless situation; sufferings from which all her mother's care, watchful though she was, yet busied with so many other interests, could never effectually shield her.

When her sisters, rosy and beautiful, full of activity, health, and spirits, were revelling and rioting in all the wild freedom allowed them—sporting upon the lawn, climbing the trees, engaged in all their joyous sports, and surrounded most often by the admiring friends of the family, never wearied with extolling, and applauding, and amusing them,—she, at that time quite unable to use her lower limbs,—a poor, sickly, rickety little one,—was being carried about by a nursemaid, evidently ashamed to shew her—in the more private walks at the back of the shrubberies. Melancholy and alone, while the rest were sporting and laughing,—nay, susceptible as she was, and with that sort of preternatural developement of intellect which is generally the fearful attendant upon these sort of disorders,—the poor little girl, long before even her careful mother was aware of it, had discerned that even this adored mother,—this beautiful angel-mother, whom she worshipped almost more than loved,—

while glorying in the beauty of her sisters, was secretly mortified and ashamed of the appearance she herself made.

The bitter, bitter pang with which this perception was first received, she had never forgotten ; the memory of it lay there in her heart, hidden, if possible, even from herself, too exquisitely painful for the recollection to be recurred to : but this night, as her mother turned away from this poor, doomed infant, with a certain look of repugnance, natural, though unjust, with which delicate minds almost instinctively shrink from profligacy, even in these its melancholy results, Calantha again pressed the little one more tenderly to her bosom.

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It had been a long, a painful, yet a beautiful story, that of the gradual developement of Calantha's heart and mind. Perhaps, in the course of this brief history, we may hear her relate it herself, to one whose heart and mind she strove to form and temper,—as hers had been formed and tempered in the fierce furnace of adversity.

Perhaps I may want space for this touching story ; more likely, skill to relate it as I ought :

for the present it must suffice to say, that the struggle—the battle is a more appropriate term, perhaps—which she had to maintain with herself, had been long and severe. Her mother—her true, firm, and unflinching friend—had stood by and done her best, done all which one human being, be that being even a mother, can do for another in such circumstances—had directed her to the right aims, and stood by her, her second in the fight.

She had planted the young heroine at once upon the basis of submission and faith.

The case was hopeless—no self-flattery was possible, and no flattery she used.

She strove to lead the child to believe in final good, though her existence was one of almost unmixed evil; she strove hard to raise her young heart to love the Creator and Father of that existence, of which her own particular portion was so full of suffering. It was a long, long time before the questioning, reasoning, acute-minded child, could teach her heart to own the force of her arguments; her clear head would keep asking questions, which her heart refused to answer.

Was that God good who had marked her out for so much misery?

She could not believe it.



She was indeed, *then*, a wretched sufferer, fast bound in misery and iron, but gradually, by the blessing of God upon that patient and righteous mother's endeavours—shall we dare to say, through those influences of divine and more than sun-beam pure of light, which *do* visit and stream within the secret chambers of the human soul?—gradually these clouds and shadows dissipated, and gradually the pure image of her being emerged as some lovely and perfect creature from the fire of her suffering.

Love—love—and faith, achieved their holy triumph in her heart.

Faith in a Good supreme—love ineffable for that Good descending to suffer upon earth, amid the mysteries of sorrow and of sin. Divine resignation! grateful and unquestioning submission to the will of the all good and wise: all the glorious hopes that brighten upon those who love and truly serve,—dwelling in the skirts of the ineffable glory which streams from the Most High, even upon this his earth;—that peace which passeth understanding, that joy which is not of this world;—all those ineffable feelings which are the portion, and the portion alone, of those who in singleness of heart sincerely live to God.

Such things became her lasting portion.

The mother, who had stood by and watched in anguish that slow developement of almost perfect good, adored the result in the humble gratitude of many, many tears.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich being poor,  
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised.”

*King Lear.*

MRS. MORDAUNT had turned away one moment as if in disgust, as I have said, but her heart smote her for the ungenerous feeling: she turned again and looked upon the little group by the fire.

That dear, gentle girl, and the poor little helpless infant asleep upon her lap. A few moments she stood watching, unobserved, the expression of tender pity and anxiety so visible upon Calantha's face, whose eyes continued bent down upon the infant — and then a new idea struck the mother. She had long lamented that want of some object — of individual interests, which, — and must now more than ever since her

sisters were gone — diminished the happiness of Calantha's life ; and now it seemed as if, at the critical moment, this poor little creature was thrown, as it were, into her arms to supply what was so much wanted.

Voluntarily to adopt a child is to incur a fearful responsibility, which few conscientious minds can contemplate without terror ; but in this case there was no room for choice or hesitation : the little being was thrown upon them, and must be reared and cared for. To send him to the parish was the only alternative, and imperfect as their success might be, the child would certainly have the best chance with them. Plans soon arrange themselves in minds so lively and vigorous as was that of Mrs. Mordaunt ; the gardener's wife was at this moment a nursing mother, it must be seen whether she could not lend her assistance in rearing this very young child ; and he might be brought up under the worthy gardener's superintendence, make one among the many boys employed in these large grounds, and be gradually trained to a horticulturist's pleasant and wholesome business.

The child slumbered on, and Mrs. Mordaunt drew a chair, sat down by her daughter, and said,—

“You seem quite to take to the little creature already, dear girl.”

“I am so sorry for it.”

“We must not send it away, I am thinking.”

“Send it away!” clasping it more tightly; “send it away! oh, no! no!”

“But what shall we do with it?” said the mother; “how are we to rear such a little creature, and what are we to do with it? It must be fed, Calantha; it will soon awaken and be clamorous upon that topic,—have you thought, my dear, how that is to be done?”

“I don’t know, mamma; but I have reared callow-birds that have fallen out of the nest, and with care and attention I shall succeed with this poor little thing, fallen out of *its* nest—only give me a little advice how to proceed.”

The mother then mentioned her plan of bringing up the child by hand, with such assistance as the gardener’s wife could spare; for this night she proposed that the child should be carried to the gardener’s house, and left there till morning, at least.

The gardener’s house was not far distant, it lay at the back of one of the walls of the large gardens.

Calantha felt most unwilling to part with

the child ; perhaps never had she more regretted her inability to walk any distance than now, when she could not take the child to Mrs. Penny, and herself ensure his favourable reception : she yielded, however, to her mother's request to give this matter up for to-night, and go to bed without exposing herself to the night air. One of the maid-servants took the child up and carried it away, Calantha's eyes following, as if she were robbed of a treasure.

Then all went to bed, but not all to sleep.

It was impossible for either mother or daughter to close their eyes for some hours. The one lay pondering upon the probable fate of the unfortunate mother, and resolving to renew her search early in the morning : the imagination of the other was crowded with all sorts of agreeable images, centering in this little creature, whom she already considered as her own.

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The next morning the mother and daughter met early in the breakfast-room, both intent upon their several objects of thought, and their consequent plans.

Mrs. Mordaunt was in her walking-bonnet and galoches, already prepared to again search the woods with the gardener's men, and discover, if possible, some trace of the fugitive mother. Calantha was, also, in cloak and bonnet, ready to undertake, for her, the considerable exertion of a walk to the gardener's house.

Mrs. Mordaunt looked surprised to see her so early stirring after the last night's fatigue, and pleased at the vivacity of her looks and manner.

"My darling child, how well you look! you scarcely seem at all tired with all the fatigues of yesterday. But going out so soon! I guess, however, to what place you are bound. And now, my dear, as you *are* bound there, let us settle before you go what proposal we must make to Mrs. Penny. It will be better that she should keep the child."

Calantha's countenance fell.

"Nay, my dear, don't look so disappointed. What better can we possibly do with him?"

"I thought I might have had him myself, mamma."

"To do what with him?"

"Rear him, to be sure."

"And what for?"

She had not asked herself that question. She looked blank, and hesitated.

“ I don’t know : I can’t tell.”

“ But, my own girl, we must both know and tell, not what *will* happen, but what we intend shall happen. This deserted child must be brought up to provide for himself at a future time, my dear.”

“ Oh, yes! Who would or could expect or wish any thing else for him?”

“ And in order to do this he must be educated.”

“ To be sure, dear mother.”

“ And as there are no funds to provide for his education, he must be brought up to a trade which will not require much—a trade of manual labour, in short. I think, if we let him grow up with the gardener’s children, he will acquire the habits of his station. Penny is a worthy man, and an excellent gardener. We cannot do better than leave him to his care.”

But Calantha made no answer.

She sat silently looking down, but there was so much disappointment expressed in her face, that her good mother was touched by it, and said,—

“ You do not seem satisfied, my dear girl.”



She looked up at her mother, with that expression of affectionate gratitude which was the never-failing recompense of all that kind parent's care, and said,—

“ I dare say I am very romantic and foolish, but I think that poor little baby has belonged to people of quite a different sort from Penny and his wife, respectable and worthy as they are. Did you observe the child's nightgown or frock, I don't know which to call it, so delicately and beautifully made? And those two small golden hearts?”

“ My dear, I am afraid we cannot do better for the child than what I have proposed. I fear your father would think me foolish and unreasonable if I asked for more than this on account of the poor little stranger. But we shall see, we shall see.”

For she could not bear to see the cloud of disappointment that gathered over poor Calantha's face.

“ The infant cannot be better off, for a beginning, than to be nursed in Penny's cottage. My love, when I was a child, infants of the best condition, both in England and France, were thus reared, till they were eighteen months or two years old. You can watch over him and

attend to him so far. In the meantime something may turn up: we may get information which may regulate our further plans."

"Will you give him to me, mother? I have not, and never shall have, either husband or child. I want something to love, dear mamma; not as I love you, but as I loved Lucilla. Let me call this baby mine."

"Yes, my dear, he shall be yours; but it must be upon conditions. You must not attempt to rear him for a position of life to which he does not properly belong. You have no means of providing for him in such a position; for I am certain, if your father were to have the least idea that your plan of adopting and providing for him would wrong your family of any of the fortune which, under ordinary circumstances, at your death would revert to them, he would take care not to leave that fortune at your own disposal."

"But what allowance my father is so kind as to give me at present I may consider mine, to lay out as I like?"

"Certainly; and so far as that will allow you to go, in maintaining and educating this baby boy, you are at liberty to make use of it; but you will find it will not go far. As to the gar-

dener plan, I shall help you in that, because it is what I think wise and what I approve; but farther than that I could not help you, because it would be neither what I should think wise nor could approve. But let to-day suffice for the cares of to-day," she added, cheerfully; "let us rear this little, precious plant first, and then it will be time enough to quarrel about what we will do with him. So you go the gardener's, with the help of Alice's arm, and I will sally forth and see whether any traces of the poor mother, which might be undiscernible in the moonlight, may be discoverable this bright, beautiful morning."

So saying, Mrs. Mordaunt rose and sallied forth through the open, front window, while Calantha, slowly and thoughtfully, and attended by Alice, took her way to the garden.

A beautiful garden it was, the sun brightly shining, and every thing around breathing freshness and sweetness. She passed through the arched walk amid the thick shrubberies, which led to the fine gardens of Mordaunt Hall.

The walls were lofty, and covered with fruit-trees; and the beds, laid out in fine symmetrical order, were filled with rows of vegetables in prodigious abundance, growing with a luxuriance and in a profusion that shewed neither pains nor

expense was spared upon their cultivation. The area of two acres thus occupied was traversed each way by a broad gravel-walk, on either side of which were beds filled with gay, but common, flowers, with knots of roses from distance to distance, alternating with honeysuckles, all cut in low, round bushes. The bloom of these was gone, but there was no deficiency, as yet, of gay colouring; for rich tufts of china asters, purple and pink convolvuluses, African marigolds, sun-flowers, purple phlox, and, in short, an abundance of these common though autumn flowers, of which I, old man as I am, find myself, from association, so fond, were growing there. Opposite to the door at which she entered the long line of forcing-houses was glittering in the morning sun. There were vines, loaded with purple and amber bunches of fruit growing in inexhaustible profusion; while the crimson peaches and green and purple figs, in their full ripeness, were peeping temptingly among their leaves. The abundance of every thing around was so great, that it was evidently impossible that the family could consume one-half of what was thus produced; and, in spite of the calls upon Penny's stores, resulting from the recent wedding-day, over-ripe fruit strewed the ground unheeded, whilst peas and beanstalks,

still loaded, were blackening and yellowing in the sun; and vegetables running on all sides to waste.

This prodigality of wealth was, however, the only thing that at all militated, to the judicious eye, against the pleasure afforded by the spectacle of these fine, well-ordered gardens.

The dew hung sparkling upon the leaves and flowers, the sun shone reflected from a splashing fountain, that played in the middle of a small pond in the centre of the garden, where the walks crossed. The sweet smell of the plants, the fresh, pure air of the morning playing upon her cheek, and the early birds hopping about, and along the walks, saluting her with their cheerful carols and chirpings, filled her with a sensation of unusual delight, as Alice opened for her the garden door.

It was not often that Calantha ventured so far; her walks, or rather slow strolls, had been chiefly confined to the lawn and flower-garden. She was very rarely, too, out of her bed-room till late; perhaps, she never in her life had been so early out before. She thought nothing could be more beautiful than this garden looked as she entered it.

Penny was already at work, standing upon his

ladder nailing his trees, and the cheerful sound of his hammer, and of a wheelbarrow rolling at the remote end of the garden, was just enough to give animation to the scene without disturbing the sense of its sweet quiet. She passed under an arch of passion-flower that adorned the door by which she entered, and looked with delight upon this, to me, I must confess, delightful picture of symmetry, regularity, succession, and abundance.

It really was charming, as, leaning upon Alice's arm, she went along the broad gravel-walk between those borders of flowers, passed the fountain, and made for the opposite door, behind which the gardener's house was situated.

There was no particular beauty about the house, for the back of a garden-wall is like the behind-scenes of a theatre; there were cucumber and melon beds, heaps of manure and compost,—the unsightly cords and pulleys which give life to the beautiful scenery upon the other side of the wall.

But the sun shone bright, and the sweet morning air played round, and the door of the gardener's house opened upon a sort of miniature flower-garden, the creation and the delight of his little children. It was laid out in tiny walks of picked white pebbles, and its fairy beds were

edged literally with cockle and mussel-shells, in white and purple rows, and filled with stocks, and gillyflowers, and pinks. The little ones were toddling in and out, and the gardener's wife, a small, lively woman, with eyes as black as sloes and as bright as diamonds, dressed with the greatest simplicity and neatness, stood in the doorway inhaling the air, and with an infant upon each arm—both infants asleep.

“Miss Calantha !” she exclaimed, in an under voice, but looking very much pleased, for every one loved Miss Calantha ; “Miss Calantha come out so far ! I hope you feel better, Miss.”

“Mamma sent you a poor, little, unfortunate babe last night, Mrs. Penny ; I come to inquire after it. Is that it upon one arm, and is the other your own ? Let me sit down, and give the new one to me. It is too much for you to have to hold two at once.”

“No burden to me, Miss, at all,” said the cheerful little woman, suffering Calantha, however, when she had entered the cottage and sat down, to relieve her of the younger infant.

“How little, and red, and thin he looks ! And how pretty your soft, fat baby is !” said Calantha.

“Bless your heart, Miss, mine is two months

old, and that poor, little creature is only about as many weeks. It's a fine baby, too—a very handsome baby of its age; and, by its linen, must have been born for better things, poor little lamb!”

Calantha stooped down, and again kissed the little red clenched hand. Seen by the morning light, she was more struck than she had been in the hurry of the night before with the delicacy of its dress. The black riband, emblem of mourning, still hung round the tiny neck.

“It's a fine boy, Miss Calantha,” pursued Mrs. Penny, looking at it compassionately; “and somebody's heart has been broke about it. Things must have gone hard with a poor mother before she could have parted herself from such a baby. Poor thing!”

“And what is to become of it, if it does not find a mother in you, Mrs. Penny? Do you know mamma wishes you to take charge of it? but it's a great trouble upon you, having one already. But I am sure——”

“Trouble! Dear me, Miss Calantha, that would be an ill word for me to use, and a wicked thought for me to think, after what the Almighty has put it into yours and your good mamma's hearts to do for me and mine. It



*would* be a pretty return of me to refuse to take one of *His* children. Law, Miss! with a little new milk and help from the kitchen, which I'm sure my mistress will give me with all her heart, I'll engage to rear this baby, and do no injustice to t'other little rogue," looking at her own with a face full of the warmest affection. "And as for trouble! dear me, we shall get along well enough, I'll be bound: never heed that, Miss Calantha."

"Poor little one!" she said, looking at him affectionately; "and you, dear Mrs. Penny, how kind of you! I wish I were strong, that I might help you to nurse him myself; but I can only sit and hold him. But I shall come and sit in the garden with him upon my lap, and give him air, while you are busy with your own concerns; for air, above all things, he must have, you know."

"You'll get so fond of him, Miss Calantha, you'll be surprised; one's heart does so yearn to a baby when one has any thing to do with 'em."

"Well, then," said Calantha, "mamma will give you the proper allowance for your trouble, and you will do a very kind and good action in charging yourself, busy as you are, with the poor thing."

“Thank you, Miss Calantha, but I want no allowance, only a little help in milk and so on. I would rather do it for the love of God. The Almighty has been very kind to me,” she went on, “and it’s little enough I can do to shew my thankfulness for it. I’d rather, if you please, *give* my trouble, as you call it, to the little one.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

“Larded all with sweet flowers,  
Which bewept to the grave did go.”

*Hamlet.*

MRS. MORDAUNT was more successful by daylight than she had been the night before. Traces were soon discovered as of some one who had trodden through the long grass and weeds which lay around the pool in the shrubbery below.

That dark, deep, sequestered pool, with its white water-lilies, and its quiet, black, transparent waters!

Drag-nets were procured, the pool was searched, and the body of Miriam drawn out.

Mrs. Mordaunt stood by, watching and directing the operations of her servants, and shuddering, as at last they cried out with a voice almost of exultation, that they had got it at last.

The drowned form of the unfortunate girl was brought up and laid upon the bank.

Her long, rich, and abundant hair, had fallen in profusion round her face and over her beautiful limbs and bosom. The exquisite symmetry of her form was displayed as in some fine statue under the clinging drapery of her dress ; her eyes were closed, her features still and composed ; she looked, as there she lay, surpassingly lovely.

Mrs. Mordaunt stood for some time in silence, gazing at her with an expression of intense interest and compassion ; at last she roused herself, and told the men to make a sort of bier of poles and branches, and thus was the body carried to a quiet room at the back of the house.

Here all that remained of poor Miriam was decently laid out.

Not the slightest vestige appeared by which she might have been identified ; or by which any trace might be discovered whence she came. By the appearance of her shoes, it would seem that she had come a good way. Her clothes, too, were very much torn ; but their form and texture, though very simple, shewed, like the dress of the child, that the unhappy mother had not belonged to the working classes. Indeed the extreme delicacy of her feet and hands would have forbidden

such a supposition. There was no proper wedding-ring upon her finger ; but upon the finger so called there was a ring, fashioned like such as gentlemen were then in the habit of wearing ; a small cameo seemed once to have been inclosed in it ; but the stone, whatever it might have been, had fallen out.

There was no mark upon any of her linen, not a scrap of paper about her.

Advertisements were put in the principal papers. The coroner sat as usual, and pronounced the verdict of " Found drowned, being to all appearance of unsound mind." So the earth and sod of the little country churchyard received the remains of the unhappy girl. No one made the least inquiry about her ; and thus the hapless story ended.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, unwilling to have their names appear in the advertisement, merely referred any one who might inquire after the child to the bookseller in the next town, who issued it.

But there was no one to notice this advertisement. The obscure people in the remote village where she had lodged, saw newspapers only by accident ; they happened to be, moreover, of that dull, incurious sort, which troubles itself little

with matters not attaching to their own individual interests. The disappearance of Miriam and her baby had been as unaccountable to them as her unexpected appearance when she came one evening and took their lodgings; having ascertained that she had left property enough behind her to pay for what was due, and the claim satisfied — having conscientiously locked up her remaining clothes, lest they should ever be claimed — they troubled themselves no more upon the subject of her fate; not, perhaps, upon the whole, very sorry to be rid of so questionable an inmate.

One other person, whose attention might have been excited by the advertisement, was at this time far too ill to be allowed to see a paper; or, indeed, to be capable of understanding anything, if so permitted, that he could have read in it.

The story was talked about in the neighbourhood a little, but that soon died away; and the child was left in the hands of Calantha, as utterly destitute of all other earthly protection as if it had, indeed, fallen from the skies.

One long, brown lock of hair, Calantha had cut off before the mother was sealed up in the narrow home; this she carefully preserved, and directed, in case of her death, that it should be delivered to the boy.

Thus he was ushered into life ; flung upon its wide ocean, to be borne by its surges no one knew whither ; the sport of every rising or falling tide of fortune.

That tide at present had borne the frail bark to a favourable shore, but there was nothing of permanence even here ; the poor baby was dependent upon accident for the kindness now received ; and accident might deprive him of that which accident had bestowed.

In his unhappy destiny, indeed—separated and cut off, as it were, from every one in existence—without a claim, save that of the merest charity, upon the care or tenderness of any human being, what of permanency, what of plan or progress, could there be ? Fluctuation is, indeed, the condition of us all ; but here nothing but fluctuation could be expected. The child became the sport of accident ; abandoned naked to that chance which Ridley, his father, believed governed the world : a prey, in short, to all the measureless evils, moral and physical, which attend upon the hapless offspring of lawless and unhallowed passion.

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The first rude blow that the child's affections, in their development, received, occurred when he had just completed his second year.

After the little glimpse I have given you of good Mrs. Penny's cheerful and grateful nature, you will be prepared to hear that she well fulfilled the obligations of the engagement she had contracted; that she nursed the child with as much affection as if it had been her own; and that the little boy found in her the tenderness of the tenderest mother. The child returned this, with a passionate attachment of which some infant hearts alone seem capable. As we advance beyond that age we wonder at, we are almost terrified at, the invincible force with which it is displayed—we are almost incapable of comprehending it.

This love, quiet and unobtrusive when at rest, was in this case quite contented when he was allowed to totter after his mammy wherever she went; but was vented in the wildest, almost fearful outcries, when any attempt was made to separate him from her.

Not even Calantha, who visited her charge almost daily, and whom he certainly very much loved, could ever persuade him to follow her farther than the garden, unattended by his



mammy. At any proposal of the sort he hurried back to her, seized her by the petticoat, hid his face in it, and screamed aloud.

He was a very beautiful child. Mrs. Penny was justly proud of him, for her own children were ordinary looking enough, and among them the little boy appeared like an infant Hercules—or rather like the young Jove, represented in an antique gem as feeding from Amalthæa's horn.

A finely-formed boy he was, with noble spreading chest, white as snow; tanned arms, moulded with the most surpassing symmetry, and little round chubby legs, brown as if stained by the walnut, but beautiful as possible; dark brown curly hair; large eyes already full of soul and fire; features of the most perfect infant loveliness; a mouth sweet as a ripe cherry, with little teeth within like pearls.

Every one who saw the child admired him; and he already shewed a dauntless and daring spirit of enterprise, as far as an infant of that age was capable of such a thing. The little fellow was the leader of his twin foster-brother into all possible mischief; busy, meddling with everything and about everything; and for ever disgracing himself amid the dirt behind the

heaps of compost and manure. His shout of infant and triumphant laughter might be heard ringing clear above the rest; as might also be heard the vehement outcries of despair and passion when in disgrace with, or parted from, his mammy.

Mrs. Mordaunt was well pleased at this new interest opened to Calantha, who spent many hours of every day, fine enough to be passed out of doors, in a little arbour within the garden-walls, which Penny had made for her, close by the door leading to his own house. He had covered it with jessamines and moss-roses, with honeysuckle and with passion-flowers; there were a seat and a table, and here her books, her writing, and her work were brought, and here she felt herself happier than she had been for a long time. Her heart, which had closed so mournfully upon itself, expanded again to this new interest; in some degree only, it must be owned. If the little boy withheld from her his strongest affections, it was but what she did by him. He was dear, but there had been yet dearer, stronger, more fervent affections, in the ashes of which her heart of hearts lay buried.

Quietly she went on her way, patient and re-

signed, employing hour after hour in tranquil self-improvement, not only to divert her from a too dangerous melancholy, but from a sense of the duty and responsibility attached to time, and the obligation to improve it by self-cultivation, even when no immediate benefit to others as resulting from it is apparent.

She went on, persevered in her occupations, sitting in that bower; the gardener's children being allowed, every now and then, to stray into the garden, and peep in upon her, to be encouraged by her quiet, benevolent smile, or repressed by her gentle, threatening hand, and welcoming with her caresses and endearments the glorious child, her more immediate care, whenever he made his appearance.

She had nursed him daily in her arms as an infant, and when he became too large and strong for her feebleness, Mrs. Penny would leave him to roll about upon the verdant carpet at her feet, or would stand talking with him in her arms for hours at a time—for Mrs. Penny did so love to talk.

Calantha had stood godmother to the child, in company with the good gardener and his wife's brother. In her lowliness of spirit she wished to associate herself as much as possible with those

she considered the child's really most valuable friends ; for she soon learned to understand that any higher views which she might have wished to form for the little boy would be rendered impossible, being condemned as romantic and utterly absurd by her father and the whole family. She therefore abandoned a plan which would have afforded herself so much pleasure and interest. She reflected that the condition to which a man is born and reared is that in which he will be certain, if he deserve it, to find happiness, and that, in this case, the lowliness of his lot would spare him many painful feelings ; moreover, that it would protect the defenceless child from that worst misfortune, a fall from better expectations, a thing which could alone render his position a cause of discontent or misery. She therefore forbade herself to indulge further in those day-dreams so pleasant to her fancy ; and associating the gardener and his wife's relation with herself at the solemn presentation of the infant to the God and Saviour of them all, she resolved to look upon these honest people as the real parents, and upon herself only as a friend and protector of the child.

She had called him Gideon—in part from a childish association of love and admiration for the

hero of the dew-distilling fleece, of whom a very good engraving happened to hang at the foot of the bed on which so many of her childish hours of pain had been passed. It represented the visit of the Angel. Every child loves the image of the Angel. It would seem as if the young creature—"still trailing clouds of glory"—claims a sort of kindred with these beautiful creations, so dear is the Angel, with his white sailing wings, to the childish heart. Underneath the picture was written what she had read so often and often with a feeling of encouragement and consolation, in those hours of mortification and self-humiliation from which, unperceived by others, she had suffered in those days so much.

"And he said unto Him, Oh, my Lord, where-with shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said, Surely I will be with thee . . . . And he said unto Him, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then shew me a sign that Thou talkest with me."

The Angel, most beautiful in her sight—with his light figure, his flowing drapery, and his shining, swanlike wings — was extending his staff and touching the sacrifice, which kindled into fire.

As she grew older, this image had taken a strange possession of her mind.

As those aspirations after all that was great and good—as the energy within, contrasted with the miserable helplessness without, pressed upon her, “Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?” would repeat itself to her mind as if uttered by an inner voice. . . . But as her mother, with unremitting efforts, endeavoured to enlighten her mind as to the duty to which all men are imperatively called of serving the Lord there where He has marked their place—and how and when—as He will, and not as they will; as this great truth became a living impulse, prompting to, and preparing her for, the offer of *her* sacrifice—the sacrifice of her submission and cheerful acquiescence,—when, after many and many a hard and bitter struggle, this acquiescence, this submission, this purest and best of sacrifices, was perfected,—then she remembered the old picture of Gideon and the Angel—then it seemed to her as if the staff divine had touched *her* sacrifice, and kindled up her heart with a pure and inextinguishable fire.

Often she had in thought compared the lot of the deserted child with her own; but there was a difference in the circumstances. He was indeed

poor in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house ; but every promise that such an early period of life could offer was here offered that he should be a being highly gifted, replete with beauty and energy. And as she gazed upon him her heart, nourished upon high things, fancied him sent upon some special mission into the world. It was but a dream, and a dream from which she was speedily awakened under the influence of the more prosaic views of her family ; but while under this impression she had named him Gideon, and the name exercised an influence upon the child's destiny. There is something fatal in names. Calantha unconsciously associated with him those ideas of angelic visions and a high mission which belonged to the great hero among the Judges of Israel ; and, perhaps, there was not one member of the family, literal as they most of them were, who did not respect him more as Gideon than they would have done as Dick or Tom.

That the name exercised an influence over the child's own imagination is unquestionable ; but of this more hereafter.

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